

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



3 1761 01453161 0

FICHTE



BLACKWOOD'S  
PHILOSOPHICAL CLASSICS



*Presented to the*  
LIBRARY of the  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
*by*  
*The Estate of the late*  
PROFESSOR A. S. P. WOODHOUSE  
*Head of the*  
*Department of English*  
*University College*  
1944-1964







# Philosophical Classics for English Readers

EDITED BY

WILLIAM KNIGHT, LL.D.

PROFESSOR OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

*William Blackwood & Sons*

*Edinburgh + London*

MCM I

1881

F I C H T E

*by*

*Robert Adamson, MA*

*Professor of Logic in the Owens College,*

*Victoria University, Manchester.*

B  
2847  
A3  
1903

## CONTENTS OF THE SERIES.

---

1. DESCARTES, . . . . By Professor MAHAFFY, Dublin.
2. BUTLER, . . . . By the Rev. W. LUCAS COLLINS, M.A.
3. BERKELEY, . . . . By Professor CAMPBELL FRASER.
4. FICHTE, . . . . By Professor ADAMSON, Glasgow.
5. KANT, . . . . By Professor WALLACE, Oxford.
6. HAMILTON, . . . . . By Professor VEITCH.
7. HEGEL, . . . . . By the MASTER OF BALLIOL.
8. LEIBNIZ, . . . . . By JOHN THEODORE MERZ.
9. VICO, . . . . . By Professor FLINT, Edinburgh.
10. HOBBS, . . . . . By Professor CROOM ROBERTSON.
11. HUME, . . . . . By Professor KNIGHT, St Andrews.
12. SPINOZA, . . . . . By Principal CAIRD, Glasgow.
13. BACON. PART I., . . . . By Professor NICHOL.
14. BACON. PART II., . . . . By Professor NICHOL.
15. LOCKE, . . . . . By Professor CAMPBELL FRASER.

# F I C H T E.



## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

It happens but rarely that the life of a philosopher has been so closely connected with the historical development of his people, that his name should be remembered rather on account of his practical activity than for his speculative researches. Yet if one does not misinterpret the evidence supplied in ample quantity by the numerous speeches, addresses, essays, memorials, and other documents which marked the celebration of the centenary of Fichte in 1862, circumstances in his case must have combined to bring about this result. Many occasional references were made by various speakers and writers to the philosophy of Fichte, and much was said of the speculative depth and richness of his writings, but all such remarks were manifestly external and by the way. The subtle metaphysician of the 'Wissenschaftslehre' had evidently, in the estimation of his admirers, been overshadowed by the patriotic orator of the 'Ad-

dresses to the German Nation.' There exists not now, there never did exist to any extent, a school of followers of Fichte; it may well be doubted if there are at present half-a-dozen students of his works. As a patriot, as representative of what seems noblest and loftiest in the German character, he lives, and will doubtless continue to live, in the grateful remembrance of his countrymen; as a metaphysician, he lives not at all beyond the learned pages of the historians of philosophy.

That such should be the case will not appear surprising when there are taken into consideration the nature of the historical surroundings of Fichte's career, and the relations in which he stood to them. His life coincided in time with the rise and partial development of the two events which have most affected the current of modern history,—the revolution in political ideas which originated in France, and the birth of intellectual activity in Germany. His life's work was the part he played in the furtherance of these movements, and the durability of his fame has of necessity depended on the significance of his contributions to them, and the way in which they have worked themselves out.

Although the revolution in political and social organisations and the rise of new forms of intellectual life in Germany differed widely in external features,—for they belonged to diverse spheres of practical activity,—they were in fundamental agreement, not only as regards their ultimate aim, but also as regards the idea on which they proceeded. Both were in character reconstructive; in both the foundation for the new edifice was sought in the common, universal nature of humanity itself. The new



political idea of the French Revolution—an idea expressed clearly, though with some contradictoriness, in the *Contrat social*—was that of the human agent, endowed by nature with certain primitive and inalienable rights, as the unit in the organisation of the state. The individual, on this view, was no longer to be regarded as receiving all state-rights by historical accident; distinctions of rank among citizens were no longer to be accepted on mere ground of fact; the state itself was to be looked upon as the mechanism in and through which the primitive rights of all individuals may receive due and adequate realisation; and the final standard of judgment as to the forms of the state organisation was placed in the reason of the individual. The body politic thus appeared not as the accidental result of the conflict of individual, arbitrary volitions, but as the necessary product of the conjoint will of individuals with common characteristics, with primitive and equal rights. The individual was thought of, not as the embodiment of pure arbitrary caprice, but as the expression of a certain common nature, to the development of which he has an original, indefeasible right. A doctrine like this is liable to misuse, for the notion of rational liberty may easily degenerate, and historically did degenerate, into the apotheosis of mere power of will; and the positive element in it, the idea of the abstract rights of the individual, probably requires much modification: but it was an important advance upon the previous theory and practice of politics.

When one examines the general characteristics of the new intellectual productions of Germany, more especially in the sphere of philosophy, one is struck by the close resemblance in fundamental idea to that just

noted. It was the essence of Kant's endeavour, both in speculative and in ethical research, to show that the ultimate unit, the conscious subject, was not a mere atom, devoid of intrinsic characteristics, receiving all knowledge from without, and impelled to act solely by the natural relations between his individual impulses and things. In his view, the nature of the thinking subject was an indispensable factor both in knowledge and in action. In all knowledge, as he strove to show, there is a common element which springs from the very essence of the subject as cognitive or conscious; in all action, the indispensable element is the conscious exercise of will under common, universal law. Thus in the Kantian philosophy, the ultimate standard, both of intellectual and of ethical judgment, was indeed the individual, but the individual only as containing a universal or common feature. On the basis supplied by this common element, philosophy might proceed to reconstruct what had been dissolved by the speculative atomism of Hume.

Although, from the nature of the matter, no similarly exact statement can be given for the essence of the intellectual efforts in the direction of pure literature, there was manifest in them in various degrees the same tendency towards expression of the universal common elements in human life, as opposed to the treatment of trivial, personal, and accidental aims and occurrences which had characterised much of the earlier eighteenth century literature. If evidence of this were otherwise wanting, it would be amply supplied by considering the excesses of the principle in the writings of the first Romantic school. Not every one could bend the bow

of Kant and Fichte: the philosophic principle that the individual consciousness is the ultimate test of truth and goodness, became for weaker minds a practical precept of moral and intellectual scepticism. The universal element sank out of sight, and there remained only, as aim of life, the satisfaction of individual, personal caprice. 'Wilhelm Lovell' is but a reckless parody of the Kantian system; 'Lucinde,' a hideous misapplication of Fichte's 'Wissenschaftslehre.'

Now the historic results of these two movements have been, for Germany at least, very different in character. On the one hand, the rude shock given by the political revolution and its consequences to the amorphous organisation of the German States, absolutely forced upon the German mind a conception which otherwise might long have remained dormant—the conception of a united, single German power. History amply shows us that it is often by what we in our ignorance call the brutal necessity of facts that an idea gains for itself a place among the realities of life; and there can be no question that the unity of the German people, foreshadowed in eloquent language by her patriotic thinkers at the beginning of this century, has been wrought out, with much swaying and struggling, rather by the pressure of external forces than by the unanimous acceptance of the idea. However this may be, and however widely the united German empire may differ in inner characteristics from that patriotic state to which Fichte, in his famous 'Addresses,' summoned his countrymen, no German who feels the full significance of the unity of his nation can fail to look back with pride and gratitude to the eloquent thinker, who, with the thoroughness of a philoso-



pher and the zeal of a patriot, drew in ideal form the outlines of that which has now been happily realised. The part which Fichte has played in this movement is a warrant of undying fame.

On the other hand, the speculative movement begun by Kant is yet far from having exhausted itself: it can hardly be said to have begun to produce its full fruits. The contributions made here by Fichte were of the highest importance, and, as will afterwards become clear, they form an integral portion of the completed philosophic view, which in partial fashion was first presented by Kant. Nevertheless, Fichte's work as a philosopher was never, even for himself, a finished whole, and the permanent results of his activity have been absorbed in the more comprehensive elaboration of the Kantian principles which make up the philosophy of Hegel. It is not probable, therefore; that Fichte's system, as a system, will ever discharge a more important function than that which has already been its work in the history of philosophy. It has made clear much that was obscure in Kant; it has contributed to give a wider range to the method of philosophy characteristic of the Kantian system, and it has served to effect the transition from Kant to Hegel. More than this it has not done, and cannot do. Not without a certain historic justification, therefore, has it come about that the fame of Fichte depends more on his patriotic and practical efforts than on his speculative labours.

Ample materials for the life of Fichte are supplied by the biographical work of his son, I. H. Fichte, '*J. G. Fichte's Leben und literarischer Briefwechsel*,' 2 vols., 2d

ed., 1862. An interesting sketch, from these materials, has been long before the English reader in Dr W. Smith's 'Memoir of Fichte,' 3d ed., 1873. I. H. Fichte's work should be supplemented by Weinhold, 'Achtundvierzig Briefe von J. G. Fichte und seinen Verwandten,' 1862; and by Noack, 'J. G. Fichte nach seinem Leben, Lehren und Wirken,' which is somewhat ill-tempered but amusing.

The complete works of the philosopher fill eleven volumes. The last three, 'Nachgelassene Werke,' consisting mainly of the notes of lecture courses, were published by I. H. Fichte in 1834-35. The other works, most of which had been separately published, were collected, arranged, and edited, also by I. H. Fichte, in 1845-46. The arrangement is systematic, but not free from faults. Several of the more important of the popular writings of Fichte have been translated with great elegance and skill by Dr W. Smith, to whom it is due that Fichte is more than a name in this country. Translations of some of the philosophic works have appeared in America, where the earnest study of German thought has been fostered by the unwearied and self-sacrificing zeal of Dr W. T. Harris, the editor of the 'Journal of Speculative Philosophy.' There is no English work upon Fichte's system; in German the best expositions are those of Löwe, Fortlage, Erdmann, and Kuno Fischer.

## CHAPTER II.

### YOUTH AND EARLY STRUGGLES.

#### BIRTH AND EDUCATION.

JOHANN GOTTLIEB FICHTE was born on the 19th May 1762, at Rammenau, in Saxon Lusatia. The little village of Rammenau lies in the picturesque country, well wooded and well watered, between Bischofswerda and Camenz, not far from the boundary separating the district of Meissen from Upper Lusatia. Here, as the traditions of the Fichte family run, a Swedish sergeant in the army of Gustavus Adolphus, who had been wounded in a skirmish in the neighbourhood, was left by his comrades in the care of one of the kindly Lutheran villagers. Returning health did not lead the stranger to take his departure. He continued under the hospitable roof of his benefactor, married the daughter of the house, and, as all the sons had fallen in the bloody wars of religion, became heir to the small portion of ground belonging to the family. From this northern settler sprang the numerous family of the Fichtes, noted, even in a neighbourhood distinguished for simplicity of manners and uprightness of character, for their solid probity and sterling honesty.

The grandfather of the philosopher, the only descendant of the original stock remaining in Rammenau, cultivated the tiny patrimonial property, and in addition carried on a small trade in linen ribbons, manufactured at his own loom. His son, Christian Fichte, was sent at an early age to the neighbouring town of Pulsnitz, and apprenticed to Johann Schurich, a wealthy linen-spinner and owner of a factory. After the fashion of diligent apprentices in all ages, Christian Fichte wooed and won the heart of his master's daughter, but not without much trouble was the consent of the wealthy burgher given to a marriage which he thought beneath his family rank. Only on condition that his son-in-law did not presume to settle in Pulsnitz was a reluctant permission given, and Christian Fichte enabled to bring his bride to the paternal roof. With her dowry he built a house for himself in Rammenau, still in the possession of his descendants, and established there his looms. On the 19th May 1762 was born their eldest child, Johann Gottlieb, who was quickly followed by six sons and one daughter.

From what may be gathered regarding his parents in Fichte's letters, it is plain that the marriage was not altogether productive of happiness. Madame Fichte seems never to have been able quite to forget that in uniting herself to a humble peasant and handicraftsman she had descended from a superior station. She had all the pride and narrowness of ideas which are natural possessions of the wealthier classes in a small provincial town. Her temper, obstinate, quick, and capricious, overmastered the weaker and more patient nature of her husband, and she was, to all intents and purposes, the

head of the household. Her eldest son resembled her strongly in the main features of his character, though he had in addition solidity of principle and reserve, and their wills came into frequent and painful collision. The mother, like many a Scottish matron in similar case, had the darling ambition to see her talented son invested with the dignity of clergyman, and for many years circumstances led him thoroughly to coincide with this wish. As he gradually altered his views, and felt himself less and less inclined for the clerical career, his relations with his mother became more and more strained and unpleasant. Fortune had removed him from the paternal home at an early age, and he was rarely able to visit his family; but after the final decision as to his career, even such occasional intercourse seemed to cease.

The rudiments of his education Fichte began to receive very early from his father, who, when the day's work was over, would teach the lad to read and to repeat by heart proverbs and hymns, and would talk to him of his apprentice travels in Saxony and Franconia. Of even greater importance for his training was the curiously intense interest the boy displayed in listening to the weekly sermons in the village church. These sermons he would repeat aloud, almost word for word, in such fashion as to show that the effort was not one of mere passive retention, but of active imagination. Strength of memory, intense fondness for reading and for quiet imaginative meditation, and deep earnestness of moral character, marked him at an early age as a boy of remarkable gifts. An anecdote referring to this period of his life, when he was about seven years of age, is characteristic enough to deserve notice. His father had brought him as a pre-



sent from the neighbouring fair a copy of the famous story of the Invulnerable Siegfried. The delight in this book so overmastered him that his other tasks began to be neglected, and he determined to free himself from temptation by destroying the cause of the evil. Quietly and secretly he took the little book, and, after a hard struggle with himself, summoned courage enough to hurl it into the streamlet that flowed by the house. As he saw the little treasure carried away by the stream he burst into tears; but to his father's inquiry as to how the accident had happened he would give no explanation, preferring then, as often in later years, to endure misunderstanding and pain rather than to offer defence for what he felt was right. When, some time later, his father proposed to give him a similar book as a present, he earnestly entreated that it might be bestowed upon one of his brothers, and that he might not again be subjected to such temptation.

So gifted by nature, the boy might have grown up in his narrow surroundings, able and upright, notable perhaps among his fellows, but wasting powers fitted for greater things, had not a mere accident transferred him to a wider sphere of life, and given him opportunity for a fuller development. Freiherr von Miltitz, owner of an estate at Seven Oaks, near Meissen, chanced one Sunday in the year 1771 to visit the family Von Hoffmann in Rammenau, and arrived too late to hear the sermon by the village pastor, whom he much admired. On expressing regret, he was informed that the loss could readily be repaired, for there was in the village a little lad able to repeat *verbatim* any sermon that had been preached. The little Fichte was sent for, and so great

an impression was made upon Von Miltitz that he at once proposed to the parents to undertake the charge of the lad's education if they would submit him to his care. No objection was raised on their side, and Fichte was forthwith removed by his patron to Seven Oaks.

The surroundings of his new home, the restraints of his new mode of life, at first weighed heavily upon the boy's mind, and his kind protector judged it best to place him under the care of the Pastor Krebel at Niederau, near Meissen. Here he remained for nearly three years, affectionately cared for by the childless pastor and his wife, and receiving a thorough groundwork in elementary classics. In 1774 he appears to have been for a brief interval at the public school of Meissen, though there is some obscurity about this fact in his biography; and in October of that year he was entered at the famous foundation-school of Pforta, near Naumburg. His patron, Von Miltitz, had died in the early part of 1774, and we have no record to show by what means the expenses of Fichte's education continued to be defrayed. From a chance expression in one of his letters of a later date, it would appear probable that his parents at least contributed, but undoubtedly they were not in a condition to undertake the whole charge.

The years spent at Schulpforta had a powerful influence on the development of Fichte's character, in both a moral and an intellectual aspect. The school was even then regulated on the old monastic plan, and much resembled what in this country till recently used to be the system of the old foundation or endowed schools. The pupils were strictly secluded from the outer world; the order of daily life, of amusement, of costume, of



study, was regulated by antiquated precepts. Each of the older scholars had a junior intrusted to his care, and exercised almost unlimited control over his apprentice. The happiness of the juniors thus depended much upon the qualities of the older members, and, as is inevitable in any close institution, the traditions of the place were in many respects evil, and detrimental to the character of the scholars. Such a constrained life tended only to deepen and strengthen traits already sufficiently marked in Fichte's character. He was by nature reserved, yet opinionative—that is, little capable of altering any view of the truth of which he had become convinced, and altogether incapable of making any effort to remove misconception which might arise as to his action. The entire want of family life contributed to strengthen this habit of inner self-dependence, which could have found relief only in the manifold interests and duties, in the constant sympathy and co-operation with others, arising from the details of domestic intercourse. No substitute for this was found in Schulpforta. The course of instruction, moreover, thorough but narrow—for it was almost entirely confined to the classical curriculum—was not that best suited to develop the neglected side of Fichte's character. In his life and in his works, what one notices as most striking is his incapacity for appreciating experience. In metaphysics, in psychology, in ethics, in politics, he constructs from within. Nature, in his system, appears merely as the negative limit of mind. Nor in his practical activity, as will appear, was he more fortunate. "Fichte," said Goethe, with much truth, "too often forgets that experience is not in the least what he has imagined it to be." It hardly admits of question that a

more realistic education, a training in physical science such as his great predecessor fortunately possessed, would have given greater weight and force to Fichte's speculations, greater elasticity and prudence to his action.

It was some time before Fichte accommodated himself to the life at Schulpforta. He was at first unfortunate in the senior selected for him. The close restraint and the unbearable tyranny to which he was subjected preyed upon him, and, after having given warning to his senior in his *naïvely* honourable fashion that he would endeavour to escape from the school unless he were treated differently, he did begin a flight towards Naumburg, with the vague intention of making his way into the world of which he knew so little, and settling as a new Robinson Crusoe in some deserted island. Only the thought that by carrying out his exploit he would for ever cut himself off from his parents, induced him to return to the hated school. A frank confession of his intention, and of the grounds for it, procured him not only pardon from the rector, but also relief from the tyranny of his former senior. He was placed under the charge of another pupil, and the years began to flow more happily for him. When at length he had reached the dignity of *Primaner*, he began to enjoy the greater liberty of study permitted to the senior scholars; and though the great works of recent German literature were carefully excluded from the school, he then obtained through Lieber, a newly introduced tutor, the successive numbers of Lessing's 'Anti-Goeze.' The style and matter of this work made a deep impression on him, and in his enthusiastic fashion he resolved that the earliest opportunity should be taken to make himself known to the

author, and acknowledge his gratitude to him. The circumstances of his life and the premature death of Lessing, however, prevented this resolution from being carried into effect.

In October 1780, Fichte's school career closed ; his final essay, '*Oratio de recto præceptorum poeseos et rhetorices usu*,' still existing in the archives of Schulpforta, received its meed of praise, and he was ready for the higher educational training of a university. In the Michaelmas term of that year he enrolled himself in the Theological Faculty at Jena—not, so far as we can judge, because his heart was entirely given to the theological career, but because no other seemed to present an opening to a poor and friendless student. The Jena lectures do not appear to have done much for him, and in the following year he transferred himself to Leipzig, where many of his Schulpforta comrades were settled. Here, in addition to certain lectures by Schütz on *Æschylus*, the course followed by him with greatest attention seems to have been that by Petzold on systematic theology. Fichte's mind, during this period, evidently dwelt on a problem which has sorely exercised many a student in like circumstances,—the relation between divine providence or foreknowledge and the voluntary determination of human action. Of the alternatives offering themselves as possible solutions, he chose with resoluteness and complete conviction that which we call technically the doctrine of determinism. The idea of the individual will as but a necessary link in the scheme of divine government, gave a certain consistency to his thoughts, and was expressed by him in various sermons preached in villages in the neighbourhood of Leipzig. From the pastor of one of

these village churches he first learned that his doctrine might be designated by the hateful title of Spinozism, and from the same friend he received the 'Refutation of the Errors of Spinoza,' by Wolff, through which he came to know the outlines of a system destined to play a most important part in the later development of his thought. On the whole, there seems little reason to doubt that so far as the young *candidatus theologiæ* had formed opinions upon speculative and critical subjects, they accorded with the 'Ethics' of Spinoza and the 'Anti-Goeze' of Lessing.

#### EARLY STRUGGLES.

The three years spent at Leipzig had been years of bitter poverty and hard struggle, which strengthened, and at the same time tended to harden, Fichte's proud and reserved spirit. Even severer discipline was in store for him. The completion of his regular academic course still left him without a definite profession. Less and less inclined for the clerical life, and embittered by the reproaches and petulant urgency of his mother, he spent three years, eating his heart out, as tutor in various families around Leipzig. To his humble petition, in 1787, that the Consistory of Saxony would allot to him some small stipend such as was often given to poor Saxon students of theology, in order that he might complete his theological studies and present himself for the licentiate examination, an unfavourable answer was returned. Without a profession, without friends, without means, it seemed to him that his life had been wasted. At the deepest ebb of his fortunes he obtained through a former comrade, Weisse, an unexpected relief

in the offer of a house-tutorship at Zürich. Accepting joyfully, he set out on foot, and traversing for the first time German provinces outside his native Saxony, reached Zürich in September 1788.

His pupils at Zürich were the son and daughter of Herr Ott, the proprietor of a well-to-do inn, the Gasthof zum Schwerte. Herr Ott, though somewhat surprised at the character of the education which his new tutor proposed to bestow, was not altogether unwilling that his children should receive a training superior to their station, but his wife bitterly resented all attempts to go beyond the accustomed routine. Fichte found his task no easy matter, and assuredly the means he adopted for carrying it out would not readily have occurred to any other tutor in like circumstances. He noted with care in a daybook or journal all the errors in education committed by the parents of his pupils, and submitted the record weekly. His strength of character and resoluteness of purpose enabled him to bear down any active opposition to his plans; but the situation was forced and unpleasing, and at Easter 1790 he made up his mind to go.

During his residence at Zürich he had busied himself with many literary efforts, without in any one of them manifestly finding his *métier*. He read and translated much of the recent French literature, mainly Montesquieu and Rousseau, completed a translation of Sallust, with an introductory essay on the life and style of the author, and wrote a rather elaborate critical paper on Biblical Epics, with special references to Klopstock's 'Messias,' — a paper, which, at a later date, was timidly refused by the editor of



the 'Deutsches Museum,' in Leipzig. At various times he preached, always with marked success, and exerted himself much to have a school of oratory founded at Zürich. For this, in which he had the promise of support from Lavater, he drew out a complete plan, and the document, published by his son, presents many features of interest.

More important for his after-career than these literary efforts were the friendships formed by him at Zürich, especially with Lavater and with Hartmann Rahn, the brother-in-law of Klopstock. Rahn was a highly cultured man, of wide experience of life, and his house was the centre of the literary reunions of Zürich society. Fichte, first introduced by Lavater, was soon received as an intimate and valued friend. Hartmann Rahn's wife had been dead for some years, and his household affairs were managed by his daughter, Johanna Maria, at this time some thirty years of age, not specially distinguished for beauty or talent, but full of womanly gentleness and tact. Fichte felt himself from the first attracted towards Fräulein Rahn, whose sympathetic nature enabled her both to understand his restless and impetuous disposition and to supply what was wanting to it. Their friendship gradually gave way to a deeper feeling of mutual affection and esteem. Secretly at first—for Fichte's pride made him think that an obscure tutor had little right to claim the daughter of a wealthy and influential citizen—they unfolded in letters their feelings for one another; but as the time of his departure from Zürich drew near, it became necessary to make known to Hartmann Rahn how matters stood. When Fichte left, he was formally, though privately, betrothed to Johanna Maria,

The course of his life was not yet clear before him, and from one of the interesting letters to his betrothed which has been published by his son, we can judge that his own views were not decided. Many plans had been debated, and on the whole his hope then was to obtain a post as tutor to some influential person at one of the German courts, which would give him time to discover where his powers were most likely to prove successful.

“On the whole,” he writes, “what I think about it is this: the great aim of my existence is to obtain every kind of education (not scientific education, in which I find much that is vanity, but education of character) which fortune will permit me.

“I look into the way of Providence in my life, and find that this may perhaps be the very plan of Providence with me. I have filled many situations, played many parts, known many men and many conditions of men, and on the whole I find that by all these circumstances my character has become more fixed and decided. At my first entrance into the world, I wanted everything but a susceptible heart. Many qualities in which I was then deficient, I have since acquired; many I still want entirely, and among others that of occasionally accommodating myself to those around me, and bearing with men who are false or wholly opposed to my character, in order to accomplish something great. Without this I can never employ as with it the powers which Providence has bestowed upon me.

“Does Providence, then, intend to develop these capacities in me? Is it not possible that for this very purpose I may now be led upon a wider stage? May not my employment at a court, my project of superintending the studies of a prince, your father's plan of taking me to Copenhagen—may not these be hints or ways of Providence towards this end? And shall I, by confining myself to a narrower sphere, one which is not even natural to me, seek to frustrate this plan?



I have too little talent for bending, for dealing with those who are repugnant to me. I can succeed only with good and true people ; I am too open. This seemed to you a further reason why I was unfit to go to a court ; to me, on the contrary, it is a reason why I must go there, if any opportunity present itself, *in order to gain what I am deficient in.*

“ I know the business of a scholar, and have nothing new to learn about it. To be a scholar by profession I have as little talent as may be. I must not only *think*, I must *act* ; least of all can I think about trifles. . . . I have but one passion, one want, one all-engrossing desire,—to work upon those around me. The more I act the happier I seem to be. Is this, too, a delusion ? It may be so, but there is truth at the bottom of it.”<sup>1</sup>

With many plans, and full of hope in his future career, Fichte departed for Leipzig in the spring of 1790. His letters of recommendation to various courts, however, produced no result ; the plans which he endeavoured to realise at Leipzig, mainly the establishment of a literary journal, came to naught ; and in the course of a few months he was again reduced to a state of want and uncertainty even more harassing than before his journey to Zürich. Nothing that he tried seemed to succeed. His Essay on Biblical Epics was rejected, as has been said, by the timid editor of the ‘Museum,’ because it appeared to reflect on the fame of the great Klopstock ; and for the other literary efforts in which he engaged, the writing of a tragedy and some tales, he had assuredly little faculty. A last effort to effect an entrance into the Church was equally fruitless. His essay or theme, probably an expansion of the ‘Aphorisms on Deism,’ printed in the collected ‘Works,’ and dating

<sup>1</sup> *Leben*, i. 55-58. The whole letter, as there given, is translated by Dr Smith.

from 1790, was received with praise by the President of the Consistory at Dresden, but at the same time with doubt. The worthy theologian thought that the author was fitter for the professorial chair than for the pulpit; and Fichte, disgusted with the narrow, jealous domination exercised over the Saxon clergy, finally gave up all hopes of carrying out his early purpose. His letters to Johanna Rahn during this troubled period sufficiently show the distress and vexation under which his proud spirit chafed. Even her affectionate counsels and earnest entreaties to return to Zürich brought small comfort to him. Towards the autumn of the year, however, we note a sudden and surprising change in the tone of his communications. He had begun to take pupils in various subjects, and among others one student presented himself to obtain assistance in reading the 'Critique of Pure Reason.' Fichte had made no previous study of this work, but so soon as he entered upon the new line of thought, he found his true vocation. From this time onwards the direction of his thoughts and hopes was fixed. His own words will show better than any external account what effect the Kantian philosophy had upon him.

"My scheming spirit," he writes to his betrothed, "has now found rest, and I thank Providence that, shortly before all my hopes were frustrated, I was placed in a position which enabled me to bear with cheerfulness the disappointment. A circumstance which seemed the result of mere chance, led me to give myself up entirely to the study of the Kantian philosophy,—a philosophy that restrains the imagination, which was always too powerful with me, gives understanding the sway, and raises the whole spirit to an indescribable elevation above all earthly considerations. I

have gained a nobler morality, and instead of occupying myself with what is out of me, I employ myself more with my own being. This has given me a peace such as I have never before experienced ; amid uncertain worldly prospects I have passed my happiest days. I shall devote at least some years of my life to this philosophy ; and all that I write, for some years to come at any rate, shall be upon it. It is difficult beyond all conception, and stands greatly in need of simplification. The principles, it is true, are hard speculations, with no direct bearing upon human life, but their consequences are of the utmost importance for an age whose morality is corrupted at the fountain-head ; and to set these consequences before the world in a clear light would, I believe, be doing it a good service."

"The influence of this philosophy," he writes to his friend Achelis, with whom he had had frequent disputes regarding the necessity of human actions, "and specially the ethical side of it (which, however, is unintelligible without previous study of the 'Critique of Pure Reason'), upon the whole spiritual life, and in particular the revolution it has caused in my own mode of thought, is indescribable. To you, especially, I owe the acknowledgment that I now heartily believe in the freedom of man, and am convinced that only on this supposition are duty, virtue, or morality of any kind so much as possible,—a truth which indeed I saw before, and perhaps acquired from you."

The letters to Fräulein Rahn now begin to breathe a new tone of cheerfulness and happiness, for external circumstances were at the same time improving ; indeed, so joyous do they become, that it is evident the tender heart of Johanna suspected a formidable rival in this strange Kantian philosophy. She was not altogether pleased that in absence from her he should laugh at ill health and abound in the highest spirits. Friends at Zürich did not think much of the Kantian philosophy,

which was to them a thing of naught, and she feared he would waste his time on utterly unprofitable study. Moreover, the scandalous discoveries regarding life in Leipzig made in Bahrdt's scandalous 'Leben' led her to distrust the influences of the place. With gentle persistence she pressed upon Fichte her favourite plan, that he should return to Zürich, be united to her, and trust to fortune to open a way whereby his talents might receive recognition. Fichte resisted for some time, wished to establish some reputation for himself, dreaded what might be said by the kindly critics of Zürich if he accepted her proposal, but ended in the spring of 1791 by yielding assent to her entreaties. "At the end of this month," he writes on the 1st of March, "I shall be free, and have determined to come to thee. I see nothing that can prevent me. I, indeed, still await the sanction of my parents; but I have been for long so well assured of their love—almost, if I may venture to say it, of their deference to my opinion—that I need not anticipate any obstacle on their part."

Evil Fortune, however, which had sorely wounded Fichte many a time, had still another arrow in her quiver. The failure of a mercantile house where a large portion of Hartmann Rahn's possessions was invested, put for a time at least an absolute obstacle in the way of the projected marriage. All Johanna's care and attention had to be bestowed upon her father, now advanced in years and feeble in health. Fichte, with a brave heart, packed his knapsack, and set off for Warsaw, where he had received an appointment as house tutor in a noble family.

During the autumn of 1790 he had been busily en-

gaged in the first of his philosophical writings,—an Elucidation or Explanation of the ‘Critique of Judgment;’ and he had been in hopes that the publication of this little work might have preceded his proposed journey to Zürich. But publishers seem to have been chary; and, after much sending to and fro, the MS. was finally doomed to remain in its original unprinted form. It is to be regretted that some portions of this, which appear to remain, have not been included among Fichte’s literary remains, for the account of the aim and scope of the work excites some interest in it. Like most students of Kant who have really penetrated into his system, Fichte saw that it was above all things necessary to make clear the inner connection between the leading ideas of the three *Kritiken*. In the most difficult and yet most instructive portion of the ‘Critique of Judgment,’ the Introduction, Kant had himself done something towards this end; but much yet remained, and as Fichte’s later philosophy is in essence the attempt to carry out, with a fresh and original method, the union of theoretical and practical principles, one would gladly have known what were his first impressions on the subject. For posterity, however, as for contemporaries, the work has remained in obscurity.

At Warsaw, where he arrived in June, after a pleasant journey, the incidents of which are narrated with much spirit in his journal, Fichte found an impossible task before him. His patron, the Count Platen, was a good, easy-going man, though heavy; but the Countess was a veritable lady of rank, who viewed all tutors as mere servants, and whose domineering disposition exacted the most servile obedience from her dependants. She



instantly found Fichte's independent nature unbearable, and his French accent atrocious. A very few days were sufficient to bring matters to a crisis. The Countess attempted unsuccessfully to procure for the objectionable tutor a post in some other family ; and Fichte, resolved not to be treated like a chattel, demanded his dismissal and a sum for compensation. The dismissal was given with alacrity, the compensation only after threat of legal proceedings. With provision for a few months, Fichte then carried out a new idea which had occurred to him. He resolved to visit Kant, and set off for Königsberg.

#### KANT AND THE 'CRITIQUE OF REVELATION.'

On the 1st July he arrived in Königsberg, and on the 4th waited upon Kant. As might have been expected, he was received but coldly by the aged philosopher, whose disposition was anything but expansive, and who required to be known for some time before disclosing any of his finer and more genial qualities. Fichte was disappointed with his interview, and equally dissatisfied with the result of attendance upon one of Kant's lectures. He could not recognise in the professor the author of the 'Critique,' and thought his manner of lecturing listless and sleepy. This, too, might to a certain extent have been expected, for, as we know, Kant was invariably averse to introducing in his lectures any of those profounder speculations which characterised his published works. Fichte, however disappointed with his first reception, resolved to bring himself before Kant's notice in a way which should be irresistible ; and in the solitude of his quiet inn laboured incessantly for some five

weeks on an essay developing in a new direction the principles of the Critical Philosophy. On the 18th August he forwarded his manuscript to Kant, and attended some days later to hear his opinion of its merits. Kant received him with the utmost kindness, commended such of the essay as he had managed to read, declined with his accustomed prudence to discuss either the views of the essayist or the principles of his own 'Critique,' and introduced him to several valued friends in Königsberg—to Borowski and Schulz. By this time Fichte's scanty means had become wellnigh exhausted; the fatigue due to his hard labour at the essay had made him dispirited and gloomy; and there seemed no prospect of an outlet from his difficulties. On the 1st September he disclosed to Kant, in a remarkable and most characteristic letter, the state of his affairs; indicated, as apparently the one course left to him, a return to his home, where he might study in private, and perhaps obtain some humble post as village pastor; and entreated that Kant would furnish him with the necessary loan for carrying out this resolve. As we learn from Fichte's journal, Kant declined to accede to this request, but in such a manner as in no way lessened Fichte's feelings of esteem and admiration for him. He recommended, through Borowski, the "Essay" to his own publisher, Hartung, and did his utmost to promote Fichte's welfare. Hartung, however, was then absent from Königsberg; another publisher, when applied to, declined to purchase the MS.; and Fichte was compelled to accept what he had resolved against, a post as private tutor. Kant's friend, Schulz, obtained for him an appointment in the family of the Count von Krockow, near Danzig, by



whom he was received, as a *protégé* of Kant's, with the most distinguished kindness. It was during the period in which he was here settled, amid more genial surroundings than he had ever before known, that the surprising fate of his adventurous essay opened to him a new path in life.

The problem which Fichte had selected for treatment according to Kantian principles, was one upon which as yet the author of the Critical Philosophy had made no public utterance. Doubtless the question of religion had appeared in all the three 'Critiques,' but the utterances in each of these, differing slightly from one another, had not been drawn together, and their application was limited to what we may call Natural Religion. But, that a certain form of belief in a revelation or supernaturally given religion actually existed, was a fact, and a fact requiring to be explained after the Critical Method. In all the previous essays of this method, the plan of procedure had been identical. Thus, in the 'Critique of Pure Reason,' the fact of cognition being assumed, the conditions under which this fact was possible were the subject of investigation. In the 'Critique of Practical Reason,' the fact of morality being assumed, the conditions under which it was possible were considered; and in the 'Critique of Judgment' the same query was answered with respect to the correspondence of natural elements, either to our faculty of cognition, as in æsthetic judgments, or to the idea of the whole of which they are parts, as in the teleological judgment. And, so far as religion was concerned, the following results had been attained. The theological aspect of religion,—*i.e.*, the speculative determination of the existence, properties,

and modes of action of a supernatural Being,—had been shown to be without theoretical foundation. In the forms of cognition, no theology was possible. But the necessary consequences of those conditions under which Morality or Reason as practical was possible, involved the practical acceptance of those very theological principles of which no theoretical demonstration could be given. The practical postulates of the being of an Intelligent and Moral Ruler of the world, and of the continued existence of the rational element in human nature, had appeared as necessary for any intelligence conscious of itself as Practical or Moral. Through these practical postulates a new interpretation was given of the world of sense, which no longer appeared as mere material for cognitive experience, but as the possible sphere within which the moral end of a Practical Reason might be realised. The possibility, then, of a Natural or Rational Religion, if we employ terms which have unquestionably a certain ambiguity, had been sufficiently shown, and the place determined which such a religion holds in the series of philosophical notions. But, so far, no result had appeared bearing upon the possibility of a Revealed Religion; and those fundamental features of human nature which historically have always been connected with the belief in a revelation, the consciousness of imperfection, of sin, of dependence upon Supreme powers, apparently found no place in the Kantian scheme. Here, then, was an opportunity for the application of the critical principles. The possibility of a revelation might be investigated in the same fashion as the possibility of cognition at all; the form and content of any revelation might be determined by an analysis of

the conditions of its possibility, just as the form and content of knowledge had been determined by an analysis of its conditions. A lacuna in the Kantian system would thus be filled up. This problem Fichte proposed to himself, and his essay in solution of it was sent to the author of the *Critical Philosophy*, not originally for purpose of publication, but as proof of ability to handle and apply the critical method. Only with the approval and by the advice of Kant himself was publication resolved upon, and the work revised and prepared for the public under the title, ‘*An Essay towards a Critique of all Revelation*’ (‘*Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung*’).

In form and substance the ‘*Critique of Revelation*’ is purely Kantian, with here and there an admixture of those additional subtleties of distinction in which Kantian scholars like Reinhold were already beginning to revel. Starting with a somewhat dry and abstract treatment of the conditions of moral or practical reason, an analysis of the will in its twofold aspect as sensuous impulse and impulse determined by reverence for moral law, the Essay summarises briefly the main principles of the Kantian practical theology, laying stress upon the fact that the acceptance of these theological postulates is not equivalent to *religion*,—that in so far as reverence for the moral law pure and simple is the guiding rule of conduct, no room is left for recognition of any binding force attaching to such law as the expression of the divine moral order. If, however, there should be given in human nature a condition of the practical motives such that the force of reverence for moral law is weakened, then it might be possible that additional strength should

be given by some indication, otherwise furnished, that the moral law is veritably the utterance of the divine will. In such a case, the human agent would be *constrained* by reverence for the divine character of the moral law, and such constraint is *religion* as opposed to theology. In this condition of human nature is found the substratum of fact, in relation to which a revelation is conceivable.

How, then, could the human agent be made aware that the moral law is of divine origin? Not, answers Fichte, through the practical reason itself, for the laws of this practical reason are self-explanatory,—but only through some evidence supplied by the world of sense-cognition. Such evidence is not to be looked for in the general view of the sense-world as the sphere within which the moral end is to be realised, for this follows simply from the existence of the moral law in us, but in some fact, which manifests its supernatural origin, and so necessitates the conclusion that it is the direct result of the divine activity. A religion basing itself upon a supernatural fact manifested in nature is a Revealed Religion, and the conditions of the possibility of such a supernatural manifestation are the conditions of a Revealed Religion.

Such a manifestation must needs be an *a posteriori* fact; but in so far as it is simply an *a posteriori* fact—*i.e.*, so far as the form of the manifestation is concerned—it cannot necessitate the conclusion that its origin is divine. As regards matter or content, the manifestation must be a supernatural revelation of the *moral* law in nature,—a revelation possible for an intelligent agent in whom sensuous impulses have overbalanced the rever-

ence for moral law. By such a revelation moral feeling might be, as it were, awakened or implanted in the heart; for were such feeling absent, no force of reason, no play of sense-impulse, could create it. A revelation, then, is possible, if the human agent under such circumstances can regard certain facts in the world of sense as the spontaneous effects of the divine will, and as manifesting the moral purpose of the divine will. This interpretation of the manifested fact, which is neither reason nor sense, but, as it were, midway between them, is the work of Imagination. The individual believes, and may believe, that the revealed fact is not explicable by natural laws; but it is impossible for him to prove that it is inexplicable by these laws. It is equally impossible that scientific proofs should be advanced that what happens according to natural laws is altogether explicable by them. The laws of the manifestation in itself are matters of indifference; for the revelation is only relative,—relative to the disturbed or chaotic moral condition of the individual human agent. The possibility of a revelation thus rests upon the possibility of a particular condition of the moral nature; and as this condition is not in itself necessary, a revealed religion cannot be regarded as necessary in the same sense in which the forms of thought or the postulates of practical reason are necessary. If there is a revelation at all, its contents must coincide with the contents of the moral law, and we can judge of any professed revelation according as it does or does not satisfy the criteria deducible from these two conditions. It must be made to those who are in the morally imperfect state just described: it must hold out no offers which are not in



themselves consistent with pure morality : it must not effect its entrance into our thought by means which contain anything beyond the moral principle : it cannot give theoretical certainty to those postulated facts which follow from the moral law. Revealed religion, then, rests upon the possible needs of the human individual in the course of his development towards pure morality. The belief in such revelation is an element, and an important element, in the moral education of humanity, but it is not a final stage for human thought.

It is not of interest at the present stage of our sketch to consider the worth of the treatment of a difficult problem here presented by Fichte, for his view of religion as a whole became deeper and fuller as his speculation slowly worked itself free from much of the Kantian formalism. What is remarkable in the Essay is merely the strength with which the requirements of pure practical reason are held as the criteria for estimating the possibility and the nature of any revealed religion. Fichte, even at this stage of his philosophical career, was beginning to lay stress upon the practical side of the Kantian system, as yielding the only complete solution of the whole speculative problem.

There was some difficulty in getting the Essay brought before the public. Through Borowski's friendly efforts, and by Kant's recommendation, Hartung was induced to accept the manuscript, and forwarded it to Halle for printing. It thus became necessary that the work should receive the *imprimatur* of the Halle censor, who was Dean of the Theological Faculty. But the censor hesitated to give assent to the publication of a work in which it was explicitly stated that the divine



character of a revelation could not rest upon the evidence of a supposed miracle, but wholly upon the nature of its contents. Fichte endeavoured, but in vain, to get over the difficulty by declaring that his book was philosophical, not theological, and therefore stood in no need of a theological *imprimatur*. With his usual resoluteness he absolutely declined to accede to the request of friendly critics that the offensive passages should be expunged, or even to the prudent advice of Kant that a distinction should be introduced between dogmatical belief, which was not in question, and *moral faith* or religion based on practical grounds; and, for a time, the appearance of the work seemed more than problematical. Fortunately, at the critical moment a change occurred in the censorship of the Theological Faculty at Halle. The new dean, Dr Knapp, had no scruples in giving his sanction to the publication, and the Essay appeared in 1792. By some accident, whether of publisher or printer does not seem to be known, the author's name, and the preface in which he spoke of himself, were not given; and the accident was indeed fortunate for Fichte. The literary and philosophic public, long expectant of a work on religion by the author of the 'Critique of Pure Reason,' imagined that they found in this anonymous essay the clearest evidences of the handiwork of the great thinker. The 'Allgemeine Literaturzeitung' with bated breath discharged its "duty to the public" in communicating to them the substance of "a work which, more than any written for a long time, was adequate to the deepest wants of the time, and which might truly be called a word in season." "Just at the moment," the notice proceeds, "when the most varied

parties in theology are contending with one another, it is more particularly of importance that a man *pietate ac meritis gravis* should come forward, and show to each in what they are in error, what they exaggerate, and what they assert without foundation. And in what manner is this essential task executed! Assuredly there is to be found here much, perhaps all, that the greatest and most deservedly famous theologians of all ages have uttered regarding revelation; but so closely knit together, so thoroughly wrought into unity, so accurately defined and justified does everything appear in this admirably constructed system, that as regards the fundamental propositions nothing is left to be desired." The reviewer, after modestly indicating his joy at seeing the thoughts which he himself had long excogitated on the same subject expressed in so masterly and complete a fashion, proceeds to give an extract, with the remark that "every one who has made himself acquainted with even one work of the great author, here recognisable beyond possibility of error," will imagine that much more valuable must remain unexcerpted; and closes with an effusion of gratitude to the great man "whose finger is everywhere traceable," and who had now placed the keystone in the arch of human knowledge. Other critics were not behind in their notices. The Jena coterie, already distinguished as the centre of a progressive Kantianism, commented on and discussed the Essay as veritably the work of the master, and treatises *pro* and *con* began to issue from the fruitful German press.

Kant did not suffer the error to remain long uncorrected. In the number of the 'Allgemeine Literaturzeitung' following that in which the just quoted notice

appeared, he published a brief statement, giving the name of the author, and expressing respect for his ability. It is true that the reviews of the second edition of the *Essay* in the same journal exhibit a remarkable difference of tone, but none the less Fichte's literary fame was by this occurrence raised at once to a height such as years of labour might not have enabled him to attain. He was marked out from all the living writers on philosophy as the one who seemed able with strength and capacity to carry on the great work of Kant. His career was determined for him, and all his vague plans and projects were now consolidated. Henceforth he was a philosopher by profession.

## THE POLITICAL PAMPHLETS.

The success of his literary venture now enabled Fichte to think of his marriage as an event no longer to be delayed by uncertainty as to his own fortunes. Some portion of Hartmann Rahn's property had been saved from the general wreck, and in the beginning of 1793 we learn from his letters to Johanna that at last all might be regarded as settled. "In June, or at the latest July," he writes from Danzig in the spring of 1793, "I shall be with thee; but I should wish to enter the walls of Zürich as thy husband. Is that possible? Thy kind heart will give no hindrance to my wishes; but I do not know the circumstances." The circumstances, as it happened, were adverse to his wish. Zürich customs exacted from foreigners proposing to marry in that city a certain duration of residence, and it was not till the 22d of October that at Baden his marriage with Johanna Rahn took place. A short tour in

Switzerland, partly in company with the Danish poet Jens Baggesen, is noteworthy as having introduced Fichte to the acquaintance of Pestalozzi, whose educational ideas were destined to play an important part in the after-life of the philosopher.

During this calmer period of Fichte's life, the great events of the French Revolution had been rapidly developing themselves, and the attention of thinkers as well as of the public had been drawn to the principles involved in or endangered by such a mighty movement. Rehberg, the secretary to the Hanoverian Privy Council, published in 1792 a work entitled 'Essays on the French Revolution,' in which a doubtful and timid view was expressed as to its principles, and the worst consequences were predicted as likely to follow from them. This book seems to have been the occasioning cause of Fichte's anonymous political tracts, the first of which, 'Reclamation of the Freedom of Thought from the Princes of Europe,' a fiery oratorical piece, was completed at Danzig. The second and more important, 'Contributions towards the Correction of the Public Judgment on the French Revolution,' was begun at Danzig, and finished, so far as it went, at Zürich. In both the fundamental principle is the same. Defence of the right of remodelling constitutional forms is founded on the infeasible and inalienable right to the liberty of realising the moral end of humanity, a right which precedes and underlies all others. The argument is in substance the translation of Rousseau's 'Contrat Social' into the terms of the Kantian ethical system; and as the whole question of Right or Law<sup>1</sup> is intimately connected with the

<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to give any exact single equivalent in English for

very essence of Fichte's philosophy, it is well to note how, at this comparatively early stage of his philosophic development, he expressed himself regarding it. As in the case of Kant's 'Rechtslehre,' so in these essays, the notion of an original contract as basis of rights within the state, is accepted not as though it expressed historic fact, but as the only theoretical foundation for a union of intelligent, voluntary beings. Within a community founded on such a contract, there are various rights and degrees of rights assigned to the several individuals or classes. But of those rights, some are inalienable or indefeasible, for they express the condition in the absence of which the moral law, the supreme rule of conduct, is of no effect; others, rights regarding modes of action merely permitted, not enjoined by the moral law, are alienable, and may be resigned by the individual. Among the inalienable rights, that which is all-comprehensive is ethical freedom; but in one acceptation at least, freedom concerns not so much external acts as internal thoughts. Nevertheless the right to free expression of opinion, to free communication of thought, must be pronounced an inalienable or indefeasible right, for in its absence the

the term *Recht*, which in different references may mean either *law* or the *rights* of the individual about which law is concerned, may be either an abstract or a collective notion, and may signify either positive enactments or the ultimate ethical foundation for such enactments. In Fichte's writings a *right* is the specific mode of action, or realisation of a motive in external fact, which is indispensably necessary under the supposition of a common ethical law or supreme ethical end. Assuming such moral end, we can point to specific modes of action which must be approved by the community, unless violence is done to the very notion of ethical law. Alongside of this, however, there are *rights* which are mere specific modes of action approved by the community as a whole, though not indispensable for the realisation of the ethical end.



possibility for acquiring the materials of thought is destroyed. No spiritual development is possible without the free interchange and communication of thought, nor is it given to any man or body of men to pronounce on the wisdom or goodness of thoughts with such confidence as to afford foundation for a supposed right to suppress freedom of thought on the ground of possible danger from errors of thinking.<sup>1</sup>

The same fundamental principle, that the ultimate foundation, and consequently the criterion, of all state rights, is to be found in the conditions necessary for the realisation of the ethical end, the spiritual development towards moral freedom, gives an answer to the more complicated problem of the right of revolution. Constitutional forms must needs be alterable; they cannot continuously correspond to the requirements of a developing moral culture. No original contract can be of a final nature, can prescribe limits to the moral and legal development of a community. The right to state reform is inalienable or indefeasible.

Nevertheless the dissolution of a constitutional form implies withdrawal from the original state contract, and such withdrawal appears almost in terms to contradict the very notion upon which state rights are founded.<sup>2</sup> Fichte boldly faces this difficulty, contends that in all cases withdrawal from contract is possible, and that law or justice requires only compensation for such breach of pact, not unconditional fulfilment of it. If injury has

<sup>1</sup> Fichte's argument here may be compared with the fuller and more concrete treatment of the same problem in J. S. Mill's tract, "On Liberty."

<sup>2</sup> This contradiction is left as a kind of unsolved problem by Kant (see 'Rechtslehre,' § 49, 'Allgemeine Anmerkung,' A.)



been done by dissolving the contract on which the existing form of state government rests, let due compensation in kind and amount be rendered. Now the injury may be inflicted on the state itself, or on certain privileged classes in it. So far as the state itself is concerned, the only relations of life in respect of which compensation could be demanded, are those which rest upon or are secured by the assistance of the state—*e. g.*, rights of property or right to development of one's own culture. But the smallest consideration enables us to see that these rights and relations are prior in nature to state arrangements. They do not spring *from* the state, but the state is the mechanism whereby they are protected and regulated. No penalty, therefore, can be exacted by the state in consequence of the withdrawal of one or all of its members from the original contract. These dissentient wills may combine and form a state within the state : this is the essence of political revolution.<sup>1</sup>

The consideration of the possible injury to privileged classes in the state, consequent on revolution, leads Fichte, in the second *Heft* of the *Beiträge*, into a somewhat elaborate discussion of the origin of privileges in general. The principles of social economy involved in his treatment are not so distinct as they afterwards became ; and as in dealing with his later writings some attention must be paid to them, it is sufficient here to

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that Fichte supports his argument in favour of a state within the state, by pointing to examples of such dual formations. These are mainly the existence of Jews in a Christian community, and the existence of a military class. His expressions with regard to the Jews are hardly exceeded in bitterness by any of the modern assailants of the Semitic element in Germany. See specially 'Werke,' vol. vi. pp. 150, 151.

remark that he subjects to the most trenchant criticism the grounds for the privileges of the nobility and the Church, absolutely rejects these as theoretically indefensible, and foreshadows the semi-socialist doctrine which is worked out in his later politico-economical treatises.<sup>1</sup>

These political writings, breathing the warmest enthusiasm for the French Revolution, not unnaturally drew attention to Fichte. He was marked as a dangerous political character, and accused, both at the time and afterwards, of democratic tendencies. The influence of this feeling regarding his political sympathies is a notable fact in all the events of his after-career. As we shall see, much of the bitterness that was poured out against him at Jena on account of his theological views had its root in hatred for his advanced political doctrines. In substance the pamphlets are still interesting, both in themselves and as indicating the strong practical bent of Fichte's thinking; in form, however, they are somewhat hard and pedantic. As in the 'Critique of Revelation,' so here, the language is full of Kantian technicalities, the structure and progress of the argument are determined by the abstract forms of the Kantian system. In both works, Fichte had advanced to the limits drawn by the Critical Philosophy. He was now prepared to push beyond them.

<sup>1</sup> Especially the 'Geschlossene Handels-staat' and the 'Staatslehre.'

## CHAPTER III.

## THE JENA PROFESSORSHIP.

THE winter of 1793 was passed quietly at Zürich in constant meditation over the main problems of the Kantian philosophy. Partly by his own reflection, partly by the acute criticisms of Schulz, whose 'Ænesidemus' had appeared in the preceding year, Fichte had begun to see with clearness where the main difficulty of the Kantian system lay. The theory of knowledge expounded in the 'Critique of Pure Reason,' was not, so far at least as Kant's own statement extended, a perfectly coherent whole; nor did there appear to be a consistent, logical transition from that theory to the more metaphysical notions which came forward in the Critiques of Practical Reason and of Judgment. Some assistance in working into system the parts of the Kantian doctrine was doubtless furnished by Reinhold, but with his method Fichte soon became dissatisfied. It was for him a necessity that the whole of philosophy should manifest a single principle, that the theories of knowledge and of practice should be deduced from one common source, and that the fundamental notions of speculative thought should be developed with systematic

completeness. In one or two occasional reviews dating from this period, and in letters to his friends, he gave brief utterance to his convictions on this point ; and, as his views grew more matured and definite, he yielded to the request of some Zürich acquaintances, and delivered during the winter a short course of private lectures on philosophy as conceived by him. The formation of his speculative doctrines was, however, accelerated by the invitation, which reached him in December 1793, to fill the post of extraordinary Professor of Philosophy at Jena, about to become vacant by the transference of Reinhold to Kiel. Reluctant as Fichte was at first to yield immediate assent to this call, he could not refuse the opportunity of entering once for all upon the career for which he appeared specially marked out, and after sending in his acceptance to Privy Councillor Voigt, he made arrangements for beginning his course at Jena in the Easter term of 1794.

The University at Jena was then at the very height of its renown. No other period, in all its brilliant history, rivals the first decades of the nineteenth century. Above all other universities in Germany it was distinguished as the very centre of the most progressive movements in philosophy and literature. The near neighbourhood of Weimar—where the most illustrious names in the new German literature congregated, where, under the genial care of a noble and enlightened prince, arts and letters flourished as in a modern Athens—gave to it additional renown, and secured the most watchful supervision over the studies of the university. More especially, however, was Jena pre-eminent as the university in which the new German philosophy had been most

eagerly accepted and most fruitfully applied. Schütz, known in classical literature for his editions of 'Æschylus' and 'Cicero,' made it his boast that he had been the first to introduce the youth of Jena to the Critical Philosophy. Hufeland, an eminent jurist, expounded the principles of the Kantian ethics, and his 'Naturrecht' is still one of the best expositions of philosophic jurisprudence. Reinhold, who by his 'Letters on the Kantian Philosophy' had won the approval of the father of criticism himself, had begun in 1787, in the chair instituted specially for him, the lectures in which he endeavoured to improve and further the critical system. Schiller, called to the Chair of History in 1789, had shown how philosophical principles might be fruitfully united with historical research and artistic production. Paulus, Loder, Ersch, and Schmid, are names not to be forgotten for the services they rendered to the advancement of German thought. Altogether, the University of Jena, at the close of the eighteenth century, exhibited a degree of life and activity which raised it to the first place among the academies of Germany. The history of German philosophy, in its brightest period, is in a great measure the history of the Jena University. For there as teachers we find Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Fries, Krause, and Schlegel; as scholars, Herbart, Schubert, Steffens, Solger, Hülsen, Hölderlin, Von Berger, and Oersted. Among the students the fame of their teachers was reflected in a peculiarly open and vigorous university life. Nowhere was there a freer or more enthusiastic academic tone than in Jena.

The call of Fichte to Jena—not, as we learn from Goethe, undertaken without some hesitation on the score



of his pronounced political views—was hailed by the university with the keenest joy. Of all the adherents of Kantianism, he alone had given proofs of ability to carry forward and develop the great thoughts that had already begun to exert their wonderful influence. “In Jena,” his friend Böttiger writes to him, “there has been for some weeks past an indescribable joy over the triumvirate of professors due at Easter,—for in addition to you, there have also been called here the excellent Ilgen, probably the most learned and cultured scholar in Saxony, as *Professor Orientalium*, and Woltmann, as *extraordinary* lecturer on History. But your name resounds above all, and expectation is strained to its utmost—doubtless in part because you are regarded as the most valiant defender of the rights of men, whereon many a son of the Muses has quite peculiar ideas. This, however, may easily be put to rights.”

On the 18th May 1794 Fichte arrived in Jena. The preceding months had been spent by him in the most arduous and careful preparation for his new task. It had been impossible, in the short interval allowed him, to complete what he had desired to have ready, an exposition of his philosophic views which might serve as a handbook for his prelections; but as introductory thereto he had drawn out and published the short tract, ‘On the Notion of the Theory of Knowledge or so-called Philosophy,’<sup>1</sup> giving a preliminary sketch of the fundamental

<sup>1</sup> ‘Ueber den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre oder der sogenannten Philosophie,’ 1st ed., 1794. The term “Wissenschaftslehre,” which we here translate by “Theory of Knowledge,” will receive more detailed explanation when the nature of Fichte’s philosophy is discussed. As no equivalent in English conveys its meaning with perfect accuracy, it will be employed hereafter, without translation, as a technical term.

ideas to be embodied in his philosophical lectures. The tract is written with wonderful clearness, but its contents amount to little more than the strenuous expression of the need for unity of philosophical conception, together with certain formal determinations regarding the first principle from which philosophical thinking must take its start. The somewhat abstract method here employed was never afterwards followed by Fichte, and it is matter for regret that the general ideas of his system have been mainly drawn from this early pamphlet, and contain little beyond its formal statements.

The reception accorded to the philosopher at Jena was of the most gratifying kind. As might have been anticipated from Fichte's character, it was his constant aim not only to reach the truth in purely metaphysical speculation, but to make philosophic principles living rules of action. The tone of his mind was prevaillingly practical, and it was impossible for him to remain contented with mere exposition of speculative doctrines. Accordingly he arranged his courses at Jena into two series: the one, more elaborate and extended, on philosophy as a whole; the other, shorter and more popular, on the effects of philosophic culture in general upon character and life. The first course was given to the students of philosophy in particular; the second, to which he then gave the title of "Ethics of the Scholar," was public, and intended for all the members of the academic body. In both courses his success was immediate and pronounced. The great hall was crowded to overflowing when his public lectures were delivered, while the enthusiasm of his philosophic students soon made the technical terms of his system familiar words in academic circles and in general

literature. "Since Reinhold left us," writes Forberg, then a *privat-docent* at Jena, "his philosophy, at least among us, is absolutely dead. Every trace of the "Philosophy without Nickname" <sup>1</sup> has been driven from the heads of our students. They believe in Fichte as they never believed in Reinhold. Doubtless they understand him even less than they understood Reinhold, but they believe all the more stubbornly for that very reason. *Ego* and *non-Ego* are now the symbols of the philosophers, as *Matter* and *Form* were then. About the right which either party has to dissolve a contract, there is just as little doubt now, as there was then regarding the manifold character of matter."

To the success of his prelections Fichte's admirable philosophic style contributed much. He had a marvellous faculty of riveting attention, of compelling thought to dwell upon the problems presented to it, and of evolving in rigid sequence the stages of a complete argument or disputation. All his writings bear more or less the character of lectures, and probably his own mode of speculative reflection was that of the expounder conscious of an audience to whom explanations are due, rather than that of the pure thinker, intent on nothing but the notions before him. He was a born orator, and, as we have already seen in his early life, sedulously cultivated the oratorical faculty as that wherewith he could best attain his great end, the elevation of life. His personality, further, combining strength and obstinacy

<sup>1</sup> "Philosophie ohne Beinamen," as Reinhold was pleased to call his rather washed-out reproduction of Kantianism, in order to indicate that it was neither *critical* nor *dogmatic* nor *sceptical*, but philosophy simply.

with the loftiest moral principle, found its most adequate expression, and was capable of its most powerful influence, in oratorical efforts rather than in systematic exposition. In Fichte, as in Schelling, and generally in the writers of the Romantic period, what the historian of philosophy notes as their prevailing characteristic is a certain hot-headed impetuosity and impatience, which contrasts unfavourably with the calm matureness of their great predecessor Kant, and which almost inevitably leads to a slight distrust of, or dissatisfaction with, their work. Something of this distrust, as we shall see later, was felt by Kant himself, who always disliked and depreciated *Genie-schwünge*, flights of genius, and trusted rather to solid, patient, methodical work, than to the efforts of enthusiastic imagination.

The Jena period of Fichte's life may be conveniently regarded under two quite distinct aspects. It presents to us, in the first place, a series of developments of one speculative principle, covering the whole ground of philosophy, affecting by their spirit and method all contemporary criticism and literature, and bringing the author into close connection, whether friendly or polemical, with the greatest living writers. In this sense, it is simply the representation of the active results of Fichte's speculative faculty. But speculative faculty was only one side of Fichte's character, and when we consider the several incidents of public life which mark the Jena career, we find rather the development of the more impetuous temper which so frequently in the course of his life led to unfortunate collisions with his surroundings. The philosophical and the practical activity may thus be regarded apart from one another.

As respects the first, a brief notice of the successive works in which the new speculative system was laid before the world, will here suffice. The lectures on 'Wissenschaftslehre,' delivered to his private class during the first *semester* at the university, were printed in sheets as soon as delivered, and from these sheets was formed the first systematic exposition of the new doctrine, 'Foundations of the whole Wissenschaftslehre' ('Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre,' 1st ed., 1794). The whole field of philosophical cognition, theoretical and practical, was surveyed in this work; but Fichte remained unsatisfied with the method pursued, and in his later, more mature writings, never employs the abstract forms which are here brought forward, and which have been falsely thought to be essential elements in his system. In quick succession he put forward detailed expositions of the several portions briefly discussed in the 'Grundlage.' The theoretical faculty of cognition was specially handled in the 'Outline of what is peculiar to Wissenschaftslehre' (1795); the practical side of consciousness in the two important treatises, 'Theory of Natural Law' ('Grundlage des Naturrechts,' 1796-97) and 'Theory of Morals' ('System der Sittenlehre,' 1798); while the whole philosophy was expounded in a fresh form in the 'Introductions to Wissenschaftslehre,' published in the 'Philosophical Journal,' vols. v. and vi. (1797), and in the 'Essay towards a New Exposition of the Wissenschaftslehre,' vol. vii. of the same periodical. These writings, taken in conjunction with the important 'Review of *Ænesidemus*' (1794), make up the philosophy of Fichte in its so-called earlier form.



A wonderful impression seems to have been made upon his contemporaries by the boldness and systematic completeness of Fichte's speculation. Goethe, little disposed to abstract thinking, and probably in his heart of hearts not over well disposed towards an eager political theorist, yet found "nothing in the first sheets of the '*Wissenschaftslehre*' which he did not understand, or at least thought he understood,—nothing which did not harmonise with his own mode of thinking about things," laboured hard to keep pace with the '*New Expositions*' of the prolific author, and in general extended to the metaphysician a cordial and respectful admiration. With Schiller, whose Kantian sympathies might have led to a warmer interest in pure speculation, Fichte never seems to have been on terms of unqualified friendship. Despite the mutual esteem which they entertained for one another, their characters were too pronounced to admit of perfectly unclouded harmony; and, philosophically, there was a divergence between their views which, on one occasion at least, led to an unfortunate collision between them. Fichte, who had been invited to contribute to the '*Horen*,' then edited by Schiller, forwarded for this periodical an Essay '*On Spirit and Letter*,' in which the editor fancied that he could detect a parody of his own '*Letters on the Æsthetic Education of the Human Race*.' The parody existed only in Schiller's over-sensitive imagination, but a somewhat bitter correspondence followed his suppression of the paper. Reconciliation was effected; but, if we may judge from the tone of the communications which passed between Goethe and Schiller at a later date regarding Fichte's academic troubles, a secret distrust

and dislike continued to exist. With his philosophic contemporaries Fichte's relations were of even greater interest. His increasing fame naturally attracted both adherents and enemies. The older Kantian scholars bitterly criticised the new effort after a completeness of system which had been foreign to Kant's original method. The younger and more impetuous philosophic students, among others Niethammer, Forberg, and Schelling, with equal bitterness accused their more cautious predecessors of want of faith in their own principles, and declared that *Criticism* proper had been but a *propædæutic* or introduction, to which the 'Wissenschaftslehre' was the natural and necessary supplement. The antagonists of all the newer philosophy, pre-eminently Nicolai, the editor of the 'Deutsche Bibliothek,' eagerly hailed the controversy as furnishing evidence of the empty and contradictory character, and of the evil tendencies, of the so-called metaphysics. With Kant himself, Fichte's relations gradually became hostile, though no open declaration was made by the aged philosopher until he had been alarmed by the accusations of atheism brought against a system which professed to be a development of his own principles. It does not appear that he had ever fairly entered into the spirit of Fichte's works,—probably he had not even studied them; but in the Intelligence sheet of the 'Allgemeine Literaturzeitung' for 1799, No. 109, he published a formal disclaimer of any connection between his own system and that of Fichte, declaring that the 'Wissenschaftslehre' was nothing but abstract logic, valuable therefore as methodising thought, but containing no reference to reality, and bitterly resenting the de-

scription of his own critical work as mere propædæutic to a system of reasoned philosophy. Fichte's rejoinder, published in the same paper in the form of a letter to Schelling, was pointed and severe. He rightly drew attention to Kant's frank admission that his disclaimer was personal in character, and not founded on thorough appreciation of the new philosophic work, and indicated that from Kant's position it was not unnatural that he should regard the 'Critique' as final, just as his opponents thought the 'Critique' a worthless and unnecessary attempt to transcend the well-defined and sure limits of the earlier systems.<sup>1</sup>

Kant's disclaimer came too late to be of any service in checking the rapid current of speculation which had its source in his own writings. Reinhold, a weak and vacillating thinker, had given his complete adhesion to the 'Wissenschaftslehre;' the Jena 'Allgemeine Literaturzeitung,' once the organ of the Kantians, declared for Fichte; and in the 'Philosophisches Journal,' of which Fichte was co-editor with Niethammer from 1795 onwards, the new school possessed an official organ of their own. Schelling's early works gave in fresh and attractive form expositions of the 'Wissenschaftslehre,' applied its principles to the more profound problems of metaphysics, and called attention to the advance effected on the critical position. Even Jacobi, strongly opposed as he was to any demonstrative or theoretical metaphysic, was not proof against the attraction of the new

<sup>1</sup> The letters between Fichte and Schelling on the subject of Kant's declaration ('Leben und Briefwechsel,' vol. ii. pp. 301-308) are of great interest, as indicating their views on the relation between the 'Critique' and Fichte's 'Wissenschaftslehre.'

system, or its apparent coincidence with his own views. His correspondence with Fichte is of the highest interest, as throwing light on the philosophical and personal relations of two eminent thinkers; and although he could not bring himself to see the similarity between the 'Wissenschaftslehre' and his own doctrines, on which Fichte laid so much stress, it was not till the accusation of atheism had been brought against the Fichtean system that he declared himself against it. On the whole, during the important period from 1794 to 1799, the philosophy of Fichte was in the ascendant. It gave a new impetus and direction to speculative thought, and powerfully influenced contemporary literature of a non-philosophical kind. If we can discover philosophical principles at all in the literary productions of the earlier Romantic school, in the writings of Tieck, Novalis, and Fr. Schlegel, these bear unmistakably the impress of the Fichtean system. Doubtless, this secondary effect of Fichte's philosophy gave additional strength to the feeling gradually roused against it.

When we turn to the consideration of Fichte's public life, his professorial career, during the same period, we find a series of troubles and conflicts, terminating in the severance of his connection with the University of Jena. Minor annoyances were not wanting to him, even on his entrance upon his public duties as professor. With his colleague, C. C. E. Schmid, an excellent empirical psychologist but a poor philosopher, his relations had been hostile even before the call to Jena, and though friendship appeared to be established between them, the truce was not of long duration. In the third volume of the '*Philosophisches Journal*,' Schmid gave utterance to a

critical judgment respecting all philosophy which presumed to go beyond the facts of experience, and in such fashion as to indicate that he had in view the 'Wissenschaftslehre.' In the last number of the same volume Fichte compared Herr Schmid's system with his own; distinguished with the utmost clearness the problem of psychology from that of transcendental logic; showed that of the nature of this second problem Schmid had no conception whatsoever; and ended with the declaration that henceforth not only everything uttered by Herr Schmid against the 'Wissenschaftslehre' should be held by him as non-existent, but also that Herr Schmid himself, in his capacity of philosopher, should be viewed as a nonentity. This satisfactory result certainly could not contribute to render Fichte's position easier; it is, indeed, only one specimen of the unyielding temper which he throughout displayed in all the actions of his life, and which created enemies for him in all quarters.

Even in his first *semester*, Fichte found that his evil political reputation was productive of discomfort. Some doubts appear to have been raised regarding the public lectures already alluded to, and in self-defence he published a selection from them.<sup>1</sup> Of the nature of these complaints we have no accurate information, but the course of public lectures presently led to a more serious trouble. In the winter *semester*, 1794-95, Fichte found that no hour during the ordinary week-days could be selected for lectures open to all the students of the uni-

<sup>1</sup> These appear in the sixth volume of the 'Werke,' under the title 'Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten' ('Some Lectures on the Vocation of the Scholar'). They are more formal than the lectures under a similar title delivered at Erlangen in 1805.



versity, without interfering with the class arrangements of his colleagues. After consultation with Schütz, he announced the lectures for Sunday mornings, between 10 and 11 A.M., thereby avoiding collision either with the special service held for university students or with the general public church service. Hardly had this been done when the Consistory of Jena raised an outcry against him for endeavouring to suppress the public service of God ; the Over-Consistory, of which Herder was a member, repeated the cry, and appealed to the Government at Weimar ; while a malicious journal, 'Eudämonia,' which scattered its mud with rare impartiality, called attention to the connection between atheism and revolutionary politics, and boldly asserted that the democrats, under the leadership of Professor Fichte, were making a deliberate attempt to institute the worship of reason. The lectures were temporarily suspended, and the senate of the university, after a bitter discussion, in which strong opposition was raised to Fichte on grounds manifestly personal, forwarded to the Government a statement of their reasons for holding that the Sunday lectures in no way infringed customary rules, recommending at the same time that the hour selected should be in the afternoon. The Weimar council gave its decision in favour of Fichte, absolved him from all blame in the matter, but significantly cautioned him to be more prudent in the future. The lectures were continued from February onwards at three in the afternoon.

This first trouble was scarcely at an end when a new storm broke out. Fichte's constant aim as a public teacher was the moral elevation of the character of the students. The life of a scholar appeared to him a life

with a noble end, and weighted with responsibilities. But to all his efforts towards elevating and purifying the tone of academic life, a blank wall of resistance was presented by the existence of the so-called Orders or Societies among the students. These orders had their own code of morals, and their own regulations for public and private action. One can well understand how entirely all individuality of life and action was destroyed for the student who had enrolled himself in one of these societies. He could not escape the force of the general judgment, and was driven, by virtue of his relations to the other members, to assent to much that would have been abhorrent to him in his private capacity. Fichte felt very keenly the evil consequences of the secret unions, and, both by his public lectures and by private communications, strove to effect their abolition. It was a wonderful evidence of his personal influence that in the winter of 1794-95, the three orders of the Jena students made overtures to him regarding the suppression of their societies, and by their deputies requested him to give and receive their oaths of dissolution. Fichte did not feel that he was entitled to conclude the matter on his own responsibility, referred them to the pro-rector, and, unfortunately, undertook the task of mediating between the students and the university authorities, a task for which he was eminently unfitted. Partly from Fichte's unpractical and over-pedantic fashion of carrying on the affair, partly from the natural dilatoriness of a government, especially of a university government, the happy moment was allowed to pass. One of the orders withdrew its offer; the others, who had placed their books of regulations and

names in Fichte's hands, were alarmed at the idea of a Government inquisition into their doings, and began to think that Fichte was playing them false. An indescribable tumult was occasioned in the university. The students attacked Fichte's house on the New Year's night of 1795, broke his windows, and insulted him with cries and hootings. His public lectures were interrupted, his wife was saluted with insults in the streets; and so serious did the danger appear, that in the spring of 1795 he had to demand protection from the Government, and finally, permission to reside out of Jena for the summer of that year. The *great Ego*, as Goethe and Schiller call him in their letters, took up his residence at Ossmanstädt, a pleasant little town a few miles from Jena, and there remained until the storm had blown over.

Two waves of trouble had thus disturbed Fichte's public career at Jena; the third and greatest finally dissolved his connection with that university. In 1798, Forberg, then rector at Saalfeld, and already noted as one of the earliest adherents of the 'Wissenschaftslehre,' sent in to the editors of the 'Philosophisches Journal' a paper entitled "Development of the Notion of Religion." With the argument, and in particular with the tone of this essay, Fichte was but little satisfied, although it was impossible for him to avoid agreeing with some ideas in it. He was extremely unwilling to exercise the editorial right of suppressing the paper, but desired to attach to it certain footnotes, correcting or amending it in accordance with what he thought the truth. Of this, however, Forberg would not hear, and Fichte printed the essay as it had been sent, prefixing

to it a short exposition of his own views on the same subject, under the title, "On the Ground for our Belief in a Divine Government of the Universe." The two papers appeared together in the first part of the eighth volume of the 'Journal.' It was certainly a misfortune for Fichte that the published exposition of his views on so fundamental a question should have been limited to the points discussed in Forberg's essay, for, to one who now studies these documents, that essay has every appearance of insincerity or irony. Accepting without reservation the Kantian criticism of the theoretical proofs for the existence of God, Forberg likewise accepts the doctrine that the belief in a divine order is practical, but he reduces this practical belief to mere strength of moral feeling, identifies it with virtue, and therefore draws the conclusion that it is perfectly compatible with speculative atheism. In short, the essay is an exaggeration of the dismal rationalism into which the weaker Kantians drifted, and by which they cast such discredit on philosophy. It is almost a parody of the moderatism which had begun to appear as the result of the Kantian system in works such as those of Tieftrunk and Heydenreich. The element of speculative interest in the critical philosophy, however, which was entirely overlooked or reduced to a nullity by Forberg, was precisely that upon which Fichte laid stress. His essay, therefore, exaggerated the agreement between his views and those of Forberg, and gave too succinctly the characteristic difference.

Attention was drawn to the papers by an anonymous pamphlet, circulated gratuitously throughout Saxony towards the close of the year 1798, and purporting to be

a 'Letter on the Atheism of Fichte and Forberg, from a Father to his Son, a Student.' Neither name of publisher nor place of publication was given, and it was more than hinted to those who accepted the tract, that it was the work of Gabler, a theologian of some repute in Altdorf. Gabler, however, was not the author, and protested publicly against the insult done him by such a statement. The real author has never been known, and the tract itself was a malicious and unfair selection of certain sentences from the essays of the accused writers, without reference to the context, and with such comments as unenlightened pietism has always indulged in. Moved by this pamphlet, the Over-Consistory of Dresden brought the subject before the Saxon Government, who, on the 19th November 1798 published a *Rescript* directed to the Universities of Leipzig and Wittenberg, confiscating the 'Philosophisches Journal' on the ground of the atheistic utterances contained in it. The *Rescript* was followed by a circular note, addressed to the neighbouring German Governments, praying them to take similar steps, and, in the case of the Saxe-Weimar Dukes, threatening to prohibit Saxon students from attendance at the Jena University if investigation were not instantly made into the conduct of the accused professors, and condign punishment inflicted were they found guilty of the charge laid against them. Fichte had thus a twofold charge to deal with,—the public accusation of atheism, and the private appeal to the supreme authorities of the university. To the first he replied in his 'Appeal to the Public against the Accusation of Atheism,' a copy of which was forwarded in January 1799 to the Grand Duke of Weimar; to the second, in the



‘Formal Defence of the Editor of the Philosophical Journal against the Accusation of Atheism,’<sup>1</sup> directed to the Pro-rector of the University, and forwarded to the Grand Duke in March 1799. In the ‘Appeal,’ a more detailed exposition was given of the views contained in the accused essay, and a powerful contrast was drawn between philosophical religion and the ordinary theology; in the ‘Defence,’ a skilful analysis of the full bearing of his theological doctrines precedes a bold statement of the real motives which had led to the accusation, and a demand that in the interests of university freedom, decision should be given based solely on the merits of the question. In the most unqualified fashion Fichte declares that the true secret of the enmity against him was the dread of his political opinions, and insists that the decision of the matter was of the last importance, not only for his own activity as a professor, but for the academic life of the university.

In order to understand the course of events, it is needful to review carefully the position of the two parties,—Fichte on the one hand, the Saxe-Weimar Government on the other. Fichte’s motives are clear and unambiguous. He claimed the full right of expounding his philosophic opinions, a right essential to the very existence of a university teacher. He felt, as every teacher of philosophy must feel, that the results of speculative analysis will at times appear to conflict with popular ideas, founded for the most part on unre-

<sup>1</sup> The title of this pamphlet, ‘*Gerichtliche Verantwortungsschrift*,’ would be more exactly translated as ‘Judicial Defence’ or ‘Plea in Justification.’ “*Gerichtlich*” implies that the defence was explicitly directed to a court, by whom decision on the merits of the case should be given.

flecting custom or on radical error, and that if popular opinion is to be the criterion of judgment, the function of an investigator is destroyed. Accordingly he demanded, with all the earnestness that the importance of the matter required, and with all the vehemence that his impatient disposition rendered natural, that there should be no compromise; that the matter should not be hushed up, or conducted to its conclusion by private negotiations within the university circle; and that as the accusation had been public, the decision should be public also. On the other hand, what the university authorities above all things desired was a mode of settlement whereby peace might be secured without the necessity of any public declaration. They in no way desired to limit the freedom of teaching in the university; and as the necessity for taking cognisance of the matter at all had been forced upon them from without, they wished to deal with it in such a way as neither to offend external powers nor endanger their own position. It will be readily understood, therefore, that Fichte's movements caused them the greatest trouble and annoyance. In a letter of Schiller to Fichte, written after the Grand-Duke had received the 'Appeal to the Public,' the feelings of the court-party are expressed without reserve. That their intentions were friendly is stated without qualification. "I have had an opportunity," says Schiller, "of conversing recently with those who have a voice in the affair, and on various occasions with the Grand-Duke himself. He openly declared that nothing would or could be done to limit your freedom of *writing*, though doubtless there were some things that one would rather not have stated from the professorial chair. Even as

regards the latter point, however, this is but his private opinion ; his public judgment would impose no limitations even in respect of it." But as Schiller goes on to say, the Weimar authorities regretted that he had engaged in discussion of the matter on his own account, and had appealed to the public, when his business lay solely with them. Evidently in such a state of opinion the 'Formal Defence' was a most embarrassing document, and from the expressions of all Fichte's friends regarding it, we can see that they unanimously thought him grossly imprudent. Rumours of all kinds were prevalent, and gradually took form in the report that the Weimar Government intended to impose a censure upon Fichte, which, as coming through the academic senate, must needs be of a public character.

It was apparently under the influence of this rumour that Fichte was induced to take a step which he afterwards consistently defended, but which must be pronounced nothing less than unfortunate. On the 22d March 1799 he wrote an important letter to the Privy Councillor Voigt, explicitly leaving to the discretion of his correspondent either to employ it further, or to accept it as an aid in forming his own opinions. In this letter he declared unreservedly that he neither would nor could submit to censure given through the senate. Were such to be imposed, no course would be left to him but to reply by sending in his resignation and publishing the present letter in explanation of his motives. The letter concluded with the statement, that many important members of the university agreed in the view that censure on the writer would be infringement of their academic rights ; that the same members had engaged, were he to

resign, to resign with him, and had permitted him to notify their intention. With him, Fichte added, they looked forward to find in a new university, of which there was rumour, a free and honourable sphere of action, such as they had hitherto enjoyed in Jena.

The new university referred to was doubtless that projected at Mainz, regarding which Jung, the chief of the council of Mainz, had been in communication with Fichte during the preceding year, and rumours of which had been alluded to by Forberg. The plan was never realised, and the colleagues who had given their promise to Fichte did not redeem it. Paulus, indeed, to whom the letter had been submitted, by whose mediation it was forwarded to Voigt, and who is explicitly included by Fichte among the said colleagues, afterwards declared that the engagement existed only in Fichte's imagination; but on a point like this the statements of Paulus are worthless.

It was this letter that finally decided the Weimar Government, and the member of the council whose warmth overcame all hesitation regarding the action to be taken was Goethe. His conservative feelings were roused by the apparent endeavour to threaten the Government. "For my own part," he wrote to Schlosser some months later, "I declare that I would have voted against my own son, if he had permitted himself such language against a Government." The *Rescript* of the Weimar authorities, dated 29th March 1799, desired the senate to censure Professors Fichte and Niethammer for their *indiscretion*, and to recommend to them greater caution in bringing essays before the public. But to this gentle censure there was appended a *post-scriptum*

referring to the letter to Voigt, accepting Fichte's declaration that he would resign, and thereby dismissing him from his office.

Again the unfortunate advice of Paulus prevailed on Fichte, and induced him to make a false step. Fichte himself was of opinion that the letter to Voigt should not have been regarded as an official document; that, even had it this official character, it should have been left to him to take the final step of resignation; and, more particularly, that it ought to have been considered whether the condition under which he had declared resignation inevitable was fulfilled by the *Rescript* of the Government. Under these circumstances, when, through the intercession of his friends, it had been arranged that the publication of the *Rescript* should be delayed for a few days, he was persuaded to forward through Paulus a second letter to Voigt, in which he pointed out that as the censure imposed in no way limited his freedom of teaching, it did not render the resignation of his office imperative, and that he would not allow the public to think that he had voluntarily laid down his office on account of this censure. The letter was communicated by Voigt to the Grand-Duke, who found "nothing in it to cause him to alter his expressed opinion." Nor did two numerous signed petitions from the students, first to prevent the dismissal and then to obtain the recall of their honoured teacher, alter the position of affairs.

Thus Fichte's connection with Jena came to a violent termination. As regards the rights of so complicated a matter, there is little ground for difference of opinion. Had not Fichte's impatient temper betrayed him into



the strong expressions contained in the first letter to Voigt, all might have been well, for the Weimar Government, despite their indignation at his impetuous mode of dealing with the matter, evidently desired to retain him in the university. But they erred in making such use as they did of the letter, and they erred doubly in the infliction of so serious a wound on the academic life of Jena. For many years the effect was felt; and as Goethe himself notes, within a comparatively short interval all the most eminent teachers had, for one cause or another, migrated to other universities: Paulus, Loder, both the Hufelands, Ilgen, Schelling, and Niethammer vanished from Jena. No injury is so great to a university as a limitation in the freedom of academic teaching. No mistake is so serious as to deal in diplomatic and politic fashion with matters of thought and reasoning.

## CHAPTER IV.

## BERLIN AND THE WAR OF LIBERATION.

THE expulsion from Jena, and the sudden termination of his public career as an academic teacher, exercised a powerful influence not only upon Fichte's external fortunes, but upon the development of his philosophic system. The difficulties which had been raised regarding his utterances on the supreme philosophic doctrine, the being of God and the nature of His relation to the individual thinking subject, compelled his attention to that aspect of his system in which it was as yet imperfect or incomplete. From this time onwards the 'Wissenschaftslehre,' as it had been expounded in the works already before the world, began to be incorporated in a wider view of character prevailingly theological or even theosophical. The whole tone or manner of treatment was at the same time altered; and Fichte, who seemed ever to feel that it was next to impossible to present his system in such a form as to be free from all ambiguity or danger of misconception, entered upon a series of popular expositions of his philosophy, which later writers have had some difficulty in reconciling with the results of his earlier method. A more precise account

of the relations between the earlier and later forms of his philosophic doctrines will be given when the whole system is reviewed ; but it is important to note here, as in the case of the 'Critique of Revelation,' a turning-point in Fichte's career.

At Jena Fichte found it impossible even to continue in residence : all prospect of literary activity there was excluded by the *Rescript* of the Saxon Electorate. Nor was it easy for him to find any refuge. The majority of the smaller states in the surrounding district had passively acquiesced in the Saxon mandate : even from the little principedom of Rudolstadt, where he had hoped to secure a quiet retreat, he was excluded by the jealous surveillance of his antagonists. The intense excitement which had been roused by the discussions preceding his dismissal from Jena had spread far and wide, and if we may judge from his own expressions, his personal safety, in many quarters, was more than problematical. In this uncertainty a slight accident determined his conduct. The Prussian minister Dohm, passing through Weimar, spent a few days at Jena, and, as was natural, conversed with friends regarding Fichte's case. The indignation he expressed at the treatment to which Fichte had been subjected was coupled with the significant remark that in Prussia no such calamities were to be dreaded by thinkers who could prove themselves good and worthy citizens. Fichte, acting upon the hint communicated to him, wrote to his friend, Friedrich Schlegel, then residing in Berlin, and was by him assured that if he could make his way to that city in such a fashion as not to attract undue attention, and could time his arrival so as to have his case brought speedily before the King of

Prussia, no hindrance need be feared. Following this advice, Fichte, in the early days of July 1799, suddenly left Jena, under pretext of taking a journey for recovery of his health, and travelled to Berlin. A few police inquiries were easily satisfied, and when the matter was brought under the royal notice, it was disposed of in the briefest fashion. "If," said the easy-tempered monarch, "Fichte is so peaceful a citizen, and so free from all dangerous associations as he is said to be, I willingly accord him a residence in my dominions." As for his religious views, these were dismissed in a somewhat clumsy paraphrase of Tiberius's pithy saying, "*Deorum offensa diis cura.*"

1.—FRIENDS AND LITERARY ACTIVITY AT BERLIN  
(1799-1806)

Warmly received by Schlegel, and introduced by him to the circle of friends centring mainly round Schleiermacher, Fichte, with his accustomed impetuosity, at once began to form new and extensive plans for literary work. It appeared to him that his narrow means would prove more than sufficient if he and his family could unite with the Schlegels and with Schelling in forming a common domicile. Against the feasibility of this scheme there was doubtless to be placed the unpleasing relations of Friedrich Schlegel with Dorothea Veit, who had by this time separated from her husband and thrown in her lot with Schlegel, and it is evident from Fichte's letters to his wife that he had much to do to reconcile her to the proposal. At the same time he contemplated the foundation, also in concert with the above-named friends, of a comprehensive literary journal, which should

apply freely and boldly the principles of the new philosophy. There seemed to be need of some such organ, for the Jena '*Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*,' formerly devoted to the Fichtean ideas, was beginning to waver in its allegiance, and Nicolai, in the '*Neue Allgemeine Bibliothek*,' and in many a dreary satire, was prosecuting, after his antiquated fashion, his favourite warfare against every novelty in literature or philosophy. Fichte, however, had deceived himself regarding his relations to his new friends. There were elements present which rapidly led to discord and even to the bitterest animosity. The years from 1799 to 1806 are characterised by the gradual overshadowing of the Fichtean philosophy, and by the development of hitherto unsuspected differences of view in the circle over which that philosophy had been supreme. To understand fully the movements of this period—a period of painful interest to the historian of literature—it is necessary to note with some care what were the main currents of thought and the general conditions of life at Berlin. We shall find in their nature the key to much of Fichte's later work.

Under Frederick the Great, Berlin had risen rapidly from a position of provincial obscurity to the rank of capital city in an important kingdom, and had gradually become the centre of the comparatively small intellectual life of Prussia. But the same events which had given it importance had contributed to its corruption. The manners of the Court in the time of Frederick, the open devotion of that monarch to the French "Illumination," the severance which his strong government caused between the interests of the individual subject and the wider aims of political and civic life, had combined to



give a quite peculiar character to the society of Berlin. It is scarcely possible to imagine a state of greater or more deeply seated social corruption than that presented by Berlin in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. The strong national feeling which had at least been fostered by the power of Frederick seemed to die out under the feeble and vacillating policy of his successor, and showed no signs of revival in any of the smaller states, where intense selfishness prevented any united action against a common enemy.' The corroding influence of the narrow rationalism which had long been preached by Nicolai and his coadjutors Engel and Abbt, left nothing which could resist the impulse of the new romantic principle rapidly acquiring dominion over the younger and more impetuous spirits in Germany. Life, divested of all permanent or general interests, lends itself readily to the sway of mere imaginative passion; and in the gospel of Tieck and Fr. Schlegel, only that seemed good which commended itself to the sentimental longings of the individual, while social relations appeared as mere hindrances to the pure poetic development of human fantasy.<sup>1</sup> As might be anticipated from the subjection of thought and action to mere sentimental imaginative longings, the influence of women began to be the most prominent

<sup>1</sup> The very essence of this mode of thought is expressed in the definition of the Romantic principle by F. Schlegel, in his 'Gespräch über die Poesie' (1800): "That is romantic which expresses matter of sentiment (feeling) in fantastic form—*i.e.*, in a form determined throughout by imagination only." The most thorough treatments of the Romantic school are those of Hettner, 'Die Romantische Schule' (1850); Brandes, 'Hauptströmungen der Literatur des 19ten Jahrhunderts,' Bd. II. (1873); Haym, 'Die Romantische Schule' (1870).

feature in society. In Berlin, as in Weimar, the leaders and directors of the new romantic school were in truth the women who stood in such close and ambiguous relation to the better-known men of letters. Henrietta Herz, Dorothea Veit, and Karoline Schelling, were the most potent factors in the disturbed chaotic movements of the literature of the time ; and the dismal quarrellings and bickerings of men like Schlegel, Schleiermacher, and Schelling, can only be understood when their relations to these leaders are taken into account.

Thus, when Fichte entered Berlin society, there appeared, as the two most important currents of thinking, the old rationalistic tendency, with at least a substratum of solid political feeling, represented by Nicolai, and the new romantic literature, of which the manifesto had just been made in Schlegel's 'Lucinde.' At first, and naturally, he was attracted towards the party with whom for some time he had been in sympathy, and whose principles had at least a superficial resemblance to the main ideas of his philosophical system ; but it was not long before the radical difference in their views made itself apparent. In the first glow of friendship he yielded ready assent to the plan suggested by F. Schlegel of taking up residence with him, and of calling to their community A. W. Schlegel and Schelling. But it soon became evident that such a plan was impracticable, partly because Fichte's strong ethical personality was in itself repulsive to the Schlegels, partly because of the open antipathy between Dorothea Veit and the wife of A. W. Schlegel, the celebrated Karoline, married, after her divorce from Schlegel, to Schelling. The proposed journal for literary criticism proved equally im-

practicable. Schelling was now beginning to cast himself loose from the Fichtean philosophy, and projected a journal of his own. The Schlegels, who had quarrelled bitterly with the '*Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*,' had already started the '*Athenäum*,' and manifestly found themselves less and less in harmony with Fichte, whom they pronounced wanting in poetry and imagination. Schleiermacher, finally, who had for Fichte a deep dislike, partly from personal, partly from philosophical difference, reviewed the '*Bestimmung des Menschen*,' which appeared towards the close of 1799, in a bitter and contemptuous manner. Gradually Fichte withdrew from the society into which he had at first been cast, and associated himself more closely with men like Bernhardi, the philologist; with Zeune, lecturer at one of the gymnasia in Berlin, a man excellently skilled in modern languages; with Hufeland, the Court physician, whom he had known at Jena; and with Fessler, the leader of the Freemason movement, which was then attracting attention in Germany. Nor was he without more powerful patrons. With Beyme, Struensee, and Von Altenstein he was on terms of friendship, and through the good offices of the first named he obtained full permission to exercise his activity as a lecturer in Berlin.

The development of his philosophic views during the same period made more clear and definite the fundamental differences which separated him from the Romantic school, and from their speculative ally Schelling. For although the stress laid in the early expositions of the '*Wissenschaftslehre*' upon the "Ego" or self-consciousness as the ultimate reality in cognition and in action might appear to indicate an agreement between

Fichte's doctrines and those of his *quondam* associates, yet it must not be forgotten that for Fichte, as for Kant and for Hegel, the unity of thought was never the individual with his empirical personal aims. It is true that upon the relation between self-consciousness, which is the essence of the thinking subject, and the wider sphere of reality, little had been said in the 'Wissenschaftslehre' itself, but the problem was touched implicitly in the 'Sittenlehre,' and came to the foreground in the religious controversy preceding the expulsion from Jena. Fichte's attention seems now to have been turned entirely upon those general elements in human thought and action hitherto allowed to remain in obscurity in his theory; and while in his popular and published writings he gave forth the results of his speculation in the form of more or less completed doctrines of morality, theoretical politics, history, and religion, the speculative method by which these were attained, and the connection of them with the earlier treatment of the 'Wissenschaftslehre,' were expounded in repeated courses of lectures. The notes of many of these lectures have been published by his son,<sup>1</sup> and at least one completed exposition of the new mode of contemplating the problems of philosophy, never published, but dating from the period immediately after the flight to Berlin, has been included in the completed edition of his works.<sup>2</sup> The inner connection of these writings with the prior stage of Fichte's public philosophical activity will be discussed at a later point; meantime the external history of his labours must be noted.

<sup>1</sup> In the 'Nachgelassene Werke,' 3 vols., 1834.

<sup>2</sup> 'Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre' ('Werke,' vol. ii. pp. 1-163).

The 'Bestimmung des Menschen' ('Vocation of Man'), published in the early part of 1800, gave great offence to the Schlegels and to Schelling by the deeply religious tone which prevailed throughout the closing and crowning portion of it. Schleiermacher, as has just been said, wrote a bitterly sarcastic review, and could hardly find words strong enough to express his detestation of it. The truth is that Schleiermacher never advanced, philosophically, beyond Spinozism, the principles of which are only disguised under the mystically pious tone of feeling on which all his speculation rested. Now the very aim of the 'Bestimmung des Menschen' is to show that Spinoza's position, that of pure naturalism, is transcended in ethical idealism; and that between the views of man as the mere product and flower of nature, and of nature as but a form in which infinite intelligence makes itself manifest in finite consciousness, the opposition is radical. The same opposition, it is plain, must exist between idealism as conceived by Fichte and the *Natur-philosophie* to which Schelling was now advancing. For in the latter, while in words Reason is made the supreme unity out of which all flows, in reality Nature is regarded as an independent fact, endowed with formative powers, and giving rise to human consciousness as we know it. The ultimate Reason, as mere *Neutrum* or identity of Real and Ideal, can have specific character only when viewed in relation to the two elements which dissolve themselves into it. If, of these two elements, nature be conceived as the *prius*, and thought as but a higher form of natural forces, then, as Fichte would have said, the ultimate Being is not living thought, but dead nature. A further opposi-



tion between the two thinkers arose from the difference of their views regarding the mode of treating natural or empirical knowledge. From Kant, Fichte had learned the lesson which he never forgot, that *a priori* constructions of nature are philosophically worthless. To him, therefore, the exercises of Schelling's "genial imagination," by means of which nature was interpreted without experiment or observation, appeared to be absolute Mysticism, mere conceits of chance.<sup>1</sup>

With these elements of speculative difference, personal harmony was not likely to continue. The correspondence between the two thinkers during the years 1800 to 1802—accompanied as it was by the publication of various writings, in which Schelling not only brought forward his new views, but called attention to their advance upon the Fichtean position—exhibits a gradual cooling of friendship, culminating in the sharpest accusations of mutual misunderstanding. Nor did the controversy end with the close of their correspondence. In the lectures of 1804, 'On the Characteristics of the Present Age,' Fichte, without naming Schelling, deduces or interprets philosophically *Schwärmerei* and *Naturphilosophie* as necessary phenomena of a corrupt and unthinking age; while Schelling not only criticised in an aggressively personal tone the Erlangen lectures, to be mentioned presently, 'On the Vocation of the Scholar,' but in 1806 summed up all his enmity against his former friend in the biting 'Exposition of the True Relation between *Naturphilosophie* and the Amended

<sup>1</sup> See generally for Fichte's view regarding the *Naturphilosophie* of Schelling, the 8th lecture of the 'Characteristics of the Present Age' ('Werke,' vol. vii. pp. 111-127).

Fichte's Theory.' Fichte's final word remained unpublished during his life, but it now appears in his *Collected Works* in the tract written in 1806, and entitled 'Notice regarding the Idea of Wissenschaftslehre, and of its Fortunes up to the Present Time.'<sup>1</sup> Here, without any hesitation, he characterises Schelling as "one of the most muddled heads that the general muddle of the age has produced," as "an utterly incompetent and bungling sophist," and subjects two of his writings, the 'Darstellung meines Systems' and the 'Philosophie und Religion,' to the most unsparing criticism.

With Schleiermacher there had been no open breach of friendship. It is curious that Fichte does not appear to have read the hostile and continued criticism of his views which runs through the 'Critique of the Theories of Morals.'<sup>2</sup> Had he done so, it would certainly not have passed without notice. But with another of his former allies he was presently compelled to break. Reinhold, who never seemed capable of maintaining a position in philosophy except by attaching himself to some more vigorous thinker, had suffered his grasp of Fichte to slacken, and had been drawn towards a new luminary, Bardili of Stuttgard, whose 'Grundriss der ersten Logik' had appeared in 1800. Of this work, recommended to him in the warmest manner by Reinhold, Fichte wrote a sharp review in the Erlangen 'Literaturzeitung,' the tone of which contrasted strongly with the eulogy pronounced by Reinhold in the Jena journal. A "Letter to Professor Fichte" in the first number of Reinhold's 'Beyträge' (1801) was followed by Fichte's

<sup>1</sup> 'Werke,' vol. viii. pp. 361-407.

<sup>2</sup> 'Grundlinien einer Kritik der bisherigen Sittenlehre' (1803).

"Reply,"<sup>1</sup> a powerful piece of writing, valuable for the light it throws upon the 'Wissenschaftslehre,' but conclusive as regards the friendship between the correspondents.

Not content with philosophical contention, Fichte turned upon the old opponent of all speculation, F. Nicolai, and annihilated him in the 'Life and Singular Opinions of Nicolai.'<sup>2</sup> All Nicolai's forms of criticism, his likes and dislikes, his laborious satire, are deduced with logical rigour from the first principle of his nature, that all human knowledge was summed up and comprehended in him, that what he did not understand was *eo facto* unintelligible and absurd, and that the mere expression of his adverse opinion was sufficient to put all opponents to rout. It is a bitter satire, not altogether undeserved, but doing less than justice to merits which Nicolai undoubtedly possessed.

The early years of residence at Berlin were unusually productive. In addition to lectures and to the writings already noted, we have during this period the work which in Fichte's own opinion was the most careful and most maturely considered of all his productions, 'The Exclusive Commercial State.'<sup>3</sup> This remarkable work is but little known, and yet it is by far the most complete exposition of theoretical socialism in modern literature. By an *exclusive* commercial state, Fichte understands a union of citizens under common laws, in which no international trade is permitted. Of the

<sup>1</sup> 'Werke,' vol. ii. pp. 504-534.

<sup>2</sup> 'Nicolai's Leben und sonderbare Meinungen,' 1801.

<sup>3</sup> 'Der geschlossene Handels-staat' (1800): 'Werke,' vol. iii. pp. 386-513.

three books into which the work is divided, the first traces the principles of such a state; the second compares them with the actual phenomena presented by communities permitting international exchange; the third considers the steps by which a state as now organised may make itself *exclusive*. The fundamental political doctrines are deduced from a peculiar view regarding property. The right of property, Fichte thinks, does not extend over things, but only over modes of action. The state, therefore, has to assign to each of its members the sphere within which his free activity may be manifested. Hence it is requisite that the state should determine the distribution of the citizens into the three grand classes of producers of raw materials, manufacturers, and merchants; should regulate the scale of production and consumption; should fix the natural ratios of value in accordance with the principle that the intrinsic worth of a thing is the amount of its life-supporting property; and should issue a money of its own which could be contracted and expanded in amount so as to cause no detriment by fluctuations of prices. In the second book, where the actual economic conditions of communities are considered, the ruling ideas are those so commonly met with in socialist writings: that in trade left to its natural course one party benefits at the expense of another; that the use of money confers a new and baneful power on some classes of society; and that among interchanging countries, the poorer, to its certain loss and harm, will gradually be drained of its metallic wealth. In the third book, the way towards the exclusive state is shown to be the rejection of the use of metallic currency, and the adoption of a circulating medium which

shall be valid only within the community itself. From this would naturally follow the restriction of the state to its own resources and the fostering of its own industries. Fichte has evidently no doubt regarding the power of the state to carry on these elaborate regulative functions : he never seems to have contemplated any possible disturbance of the balance between production and consumption, nor to have considered the natural influences which determine the course and forms of industry. The 'Exclusive Commercial State' is the best illustration of his total neglect of experience and want of power to bring his abstract notions into connection with concrete historical reality.

The lectures at Berlin continued to gain in popularity and in influence. The most eminent citizens and statesmen were to be found in attendance on them, and it was but natural that the idea should occur to reinstate Fichte in some position as academical lecturer. In 1804 he was invited by the Russian Government to the newly organised university at Charkow ; in the same year he was offered a chair at the Bavarian university of Landshut. The first invitation he declined, because he felt that the foreign surroundings would diminish his influence and activity ; the second he likewise refused, rather from dread of the strong ecclesiastical feeling in Bavaria than from disinclination to the university there. Towards the close of the same year, however, Beyme procured for him an offer, which he gladly accepted, of the Chair of Philosophy at Erlangen, under condition that he should be required to lecture during summer only, and might reside at Berlin during the winter months. In May 1805 he opened his course at Erlangen,



was received with distinction by his colleagues, and here delivered to the whole body of students the lectures on the 'Nature of the Scholar,' which were published in the ensuing year.<sup>1</sup> Almost simultaneously there appeared the lectures delivered at Berlin in the winter of 1804-5, 'On the Characteristics of the Present Age,' and those delivered in the winter of 1805-6, 'The Way towards the Blessed Life, or Doctrine of Religion.'<sup>2</sup> The three sets of lectures form a completed whole: the first part, the 'Characteristics,' analysing the present state of culture and thought; the second, 'The Nature of the Scholar,' indicating the spirit in which the attempt to rise to a higher stage should be made; the third, sketching in bold outlines the completed reconciliation of life and thought in religion. In them the results of Fichte's speculation are presented in popular form, and they are certainly incomparable specimens of the union of vigorous philosophical thought and masterly skill in exposition.

The fundamental idea of these works, expressed in various forms, has been made familiar to English readers through the teaching of England's greatest modern moralist. The guiding principle of all Carlyle's ethical work is the principle of Fichte's speculation, that the world of experience is but the appearance or vesture of the divine idea or life; that in this divine life lie the springs of true poetry, of true science, and of true religion; and that he only has true life whose spirit is interpenetrated with the realities transcending empirical

<sup>1</sup> 'Werke,' vol. vi. pp. 347-448. They have been translated by Dr W. Smith.

<sup>2</sup> The "Grundzüge," in 'Werke,' vol. vii. pp. 1-256; the "Anweisung," 'Werke,' vol. v. pp. 397-580. Both in English by Dr Smith.

facts, who is willing to resign his own personality in the service of humanity, and who strives incessantly to work out the ideal that gives nobility and grandeur to human effort.<sup>1</sup> By slow degrees does humanity work out its aim, the perfect ordering of life according to Reason and with Freedom; and the period of construction, in which the general Reason moulds and fashions the thoughts and practical efforts of mankind, is preceded by the destructive period of individualist criticism. The characteristics of this destructive age, the principles of the *Aufklärung*, are drawn by Fichte with a master-hand, and in the state of German thought and society he had before him the realisation of his sketch. The present age appeared to him, in its lack of devotion to general interests, in its cold individualism, mechanical statecraft, and selfish morality, the condition of completed sinfulness. The call to the higher life, which he raised on philosophical grounds, was soon to become the passionate appeal of the patriot, who saw in the degradation of his country the effects of a false system of thought and ethical principle.

## 2.—FALL AND REGENERATION OF PRUSSIA: THE BERLIN UNIVERSITY.

The outbreak of the war between France and Prussia in 1806 had been preceded by events which showed all

<sup>1</sup> Mere references to Fichte are numerous enough in Carlyle (see, e.g., 'On Heroes,' Lect. vi., the essays on the 'State of German Literature,' and on 'Novalis'), but the full significance of the relation between them can become clear only when one compares the thoughtful essay entitled 'Characteristics,' and the 'Sartor Resartus,' with Fichte's popular works above named, specially the 'Grundzüge d. gegen. Zeitalters.'

too clearly how deep was the disorder and corruption of the German national feeling. The selfish and vacillating policy of Prussia had rendered it possible for her to be the isolated object of Napoleon's hostility. The shameful *Rheinbund*, completed in July 1806, had placed the princes of Southern and Western Germany under the headship of France, and had separated them from the German empire. Even the shadowy bond which seemed to unite the German States had been dissolved by the Austrian emperor's renunciation of the Kaiserate, while the passive attitude of Prussia during the overthrow of Austria in 1805 had alienated the two great German Powers.<sup>1</sup> The declaration of war with France was hailed with joy in Prussia as the one evidence yet remaining of life and independence in the state. The great triumphs of the Prussian army in the past inspired a feeling of confidence which unfortunately had no sound basis. The Berlin circles waited eagerly for the news of victories which they were prepared to celebrate, and the announcement of the terrible calamities of Jena and Auerstädt came like thunder from a clear sky. The Prussian power at a single stroke was shattered. The army was driven into fragments, fortress after fortress fell without resistance into the hands of the conqueror, and Berlin was left without defence. Fichte, with his friend Hufeland, fled beyond the Oder to follow the fortunes of the de-

<sup>1</sup> An admirable picture of German politics at this period is given in the anonymous pamphlet, 'Deutschland in seiner tiefen Erniedrigung,' published in the summer of 1806, for the printing of which the unfortunate bookseller Palm, of Nürnberg, was shot by order of Napoleon. The more extensive historical works bearing on the period, especially the lives of Stein by Pertz and Seeley, give more copious information.

feated king, and to await the development of the struggle in East Prussia, where Russian aid could be counted on. His wife remained to protect the family and goods of the united households.

At Stargard, where Fichte first halted, he found to his amusement a full-grown university in which his name and fame were absolutely unknown, and where it was necessary for him to inform his brother professors of the subject which he professed. At Königsberg, where he took up residence from November 1806 till June 1807, he was received with more intelligent appreciation, was nominated temporary professor, and delivered lectures, both publicly and in private, on the 'Wissenschaftslehre.' Here, too, he worked diligently at the study of modern languages, which he had begun under Delbrück, and above all, at Pestalozzi's educational schemes, in which he seemed to find the seeds for the regeneration of public feeling in Germany. The fall of Danzig and the battle of Friedland drove him from Königsberg a few days before the conclusion of the melancholy Peace of Tilsit. After a stormy sea-voyage he reached Copenhagen, where he was greeted with warm affection by his former scholar Oersted, now a brilliant and successful professor at the Danish university. Not till August 1807 did he return to Berlin.

The calamities of Prussia had drawn the attention of all her greatest thinkers to the causes of such an unexpected collapse. With the instinctive feeling of a great nation still full of vital power, it was seen that regeneration was as possible as it was necessary, but that such regeneration must spring from a united and purified national spirit. The old mechanism which, when ani-

mated by a Frederick II., had been powerful and fit for great ends, must be set aside. The antiquated laws that separated the people into distinct and hostile classes, and substituted class interests for public sympathy, must be amended. The army, which had become an *imperium in imperio*, so hateful that even the defeat of the nation could not repress joy at the overthrow of the *Junkertum*, must be made truly to represent the national will and force. Above all, what lay as positive principle at the root of all efforts towards amendment, the national education must again become a training through which the spiritual powers of the individual might be strengthened, and the feeling of corporate unity reinstated. Chaotic enough were some of the efforts to realise these obscurely felt longings, and one must smile at the good old Jahn's endeavour to regenerate the nation by converting it into one gigantic *Turnverein* (gymnastic association); but nevertheless Prussia possessed a noble band of clear-sighted and strong-hearted sons, who severally took up and developed the ideas which converged towards one end, the reformation of the national mind. Stein and Hardenberg bent all their energies to the destruction of the old land laws which still held a large portion of the people in the state of villeinage, to the restriction of class-privileges, and to the institution of a system of local government which might knit together the several members of the state. Scharnhorst undertook the reformation of the military order, and laid the foundations of the system which has made the German army the most powerful engine of war the world has ever seen.<sup>1</sup> To Fichte fell the task of endeavouring by

<sup>1</sup> It is quite beyond the scope of this sketch to give any more de-



his eloquence to turn the attention of the nation to the need for a new spiritual education. Already had he felt that in this way only could he discharge his heartfelt duty to the state. On the outbreak of the war in 1806, he had proposed to Beyme that he should be permitted to accompany the army as lay-preacher, and had received from the king thanks for an offer which was not accepted. The call to action was even stronger now than formerly, and at all hazards it was obeyed. On successive Sunday evenings, from 13th December 1807 to 20th March 1808, he delivered in the great hall of the Academy of Sciences, before a crowded audience, his famous "Addresses to the German Nation." The French were still in occupation of Berlin: well-known spies frequented the lecture-hall, and fears were openly expressed for the safety of the speaker. But to a speculative treatment of patriotism the French naturally attached but small weight; the 'Moniteur' intimated that a famous philosopher, named Fichte, was delivering a course of lectures on reforms in education; no steps were taken against him either at the time or at a later date, when men such as Schleiermacher and Wolf were cautioned by the French commandant, Davoust. One need not wonder at such indifference, for, in truth, to many of his own countrymen Fichte's words were of as little weight as to the foreigner. Contemporary records preserve a quite surprising silence regarding the 'Reden.'<sup>1</sup>

tailed notice of these great works. A very complete survey is contained in Häusser's 'Deutsche Geschichte vom Tode Friedrichs des Grossen,' vol. iii. pp. 120-254. The land reforms are stated with precision in Mr Morier's essay, 'Systems of Land Tenure' (Cobden Club), pp. 243-285.

<sup>1</sup> See J. Bona Meyer, 'Ueber Fichte's Reden' (1862). The notes

The 'Addresses' link themselves naturally to the 'Characteristics of the Present Age.' In the latter, Fichte had depicted the times as the "age of completed sinfulness," and had referred them to the third great epoch in the history of humanity, the period when Reason is beginning to free itself from instinct and authority. By the force of events this age had been brought, for Germany at least, to a violent close. Individualism, with its selfish morality and statecraft, had been shattered by a blow dealt from without. The new epoch, that of the conscious recognition of Reason, had been inaugurated, and it remained to be seen how far Germany was fit to enter on its noble inheritance, and by what method it should be brought to take possession. There are thus in the 'Addresses' two leading trains of thought—a survey of those elements in the German spirit out of which the new state may be constructed, and an exposition of the mode by which they are to be utilised.

Moral regeneration of a nation, the education of the individual to the great general interests, is only possible when there is a free and living national spirit, capable of uniting the several members in the service of a common end. The German spirit is free and living, for the German people is pure and unmixed, and its history is the development of a single stock. The wonderful plasticity of the German language, which renders it capable of expressing in vivid and pictorial fashion the

to this little pamphlet, which contains an excellent treatment of the 'Addresses,' give many interesting particulars regarding the circumstances under which they were delivered and the impression made by them. See also Seeley's 'Stein,' vol. ii. pp. 27-42.

profoundest thought, is in itself a sufficient proof that the German people has the stamp of originality. The languages of the Germanic and the Neo-Latin races, as compared with the pure German tongue, are lifeless and mechanical. No people which had not a free and original national feeling could have taken up and worked out to a glorious termination the great idea of the Reformation. No people save the German has proved its capacity for the deepest philosophical speculation. In its language, in its religious depth, and in its philosophical power, Germany amply proves itself a free and living people. For Fichte, indeed, as Kuno Fischer well says, Germany is the Ego among all nations.

There lie, then, in the German spirit the possibilities of a noble ethical life for the individual, of a pure and rational state, of a religion which shall penetrate the life of humanity.<sup>1</sup> How shall these possibilities be realised? Not otherwise than by a new system of national education, a system which shall have as its aim the perfection of the moral nature of the individual, and which shall at every step draw closer the links that bind the individual to the community. The groundwork of such a new education had already been laid by a deep-thinking German, by Pestalozzi; and the salvation of the people is to be looked for in the universal adoption and earnest realisation of what is true and original in his methods.

Fichte proceeds, then, to develop at some length his scheme of national education in its several stages of in-

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that Fichte thinks Germany the only nation that has shown itself fit to realise the ideal of a republican constitution ('*Werke*,' vol. vii. pp. 357).

fant training, of school and university discipline. Like Pestalozzi, he lays stress on the necessity of beginning with real intuition and not with words or symbols; but he subjects to acute criticism Pestalozzi's method, and substitutes for it a threefold training in accurate discrimination of the elements of sense experience—*i.e.*, feelings—of the intuitions of external realities, and of bodily movements. So soon as this preparatory discipline has been completed, it is needful that children should be removed from the many home influences that corrupt education, and reduce the efforts of instructors to nullity. Education is a national affair, and must be conducted by the nation at the general expense. The state must support a body of teachers; and a common education, embracing along with the culture of the intellect an adequate technical training, must be provided for all.<sup>1</sup> By this means, and by it only, the common ethical feeling, the sense of national unity, can be fostered and made productive. Germany must become an "exclusive educational state," and patriotic feeling become the mainspring of action. A united Germany would be the best safeguard against the evils of the artificial "balance of power" policy, which for long had been the bane of the German States. It might resist the evil pressure of international commerce, which makes the poorer country a natural prey for the more wealthy. Above all things, the unique richness and depth of the German character are a sufficient demonstration of the folly of these dreams of universal monarchy,

<sup>1</sup> With Fichte's idea of the necessity and value of training to some mechanical occupation, one may compare the fantastic *pædagogium* in 'Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre.'

which can be realised only at the cost of national individuality.

To this great work,—a work of the last importance, not for Germany alone, but for humanity at large,—all ranks and classes are summoned. On the present age rests the task of carrying forward the great spirit that has animated civilisation, and of vindicating the noble place that has been held by the German people in the world's history.

“In these addresses” (thus proceeds the fine peroration of Fichte's last lecture) “the memory of your forefathers speaks to you. Think that with my voice there are mingled the voices of your ancestors from the far-off ages of grey antiquity, of those who stemmed with their own bodies the tide of Roman domination over the world, who vindicated with their own blood the independence of those mountains, plains, and streams which under you have been suffered to fall a prey to the stranger. They call to you,—‘Take ye our place’—hand down our memory to future ages, honourable and spotless as it has come down to you, as you have gloried in it and in your descent from us. Hitherto our struggle has been deemed noble, great, and wise ;—we have been looked upon as the consecrated and inspired ones of a Divine World-plan. Should our race perish with you, then will our honour be changed into dishonour, our wisdom into folly. For if Germany were ever to be subdued to the empire, then had it been better to have fallen before the ancient Romans than before their modern descendants. We withstood those and triumphed ; these have scattered you like chaff before them. But as matters now are with you, seek not to conquer with bodily weapons, but stand firm and erect before them in spiritual dignity. Yours is the greater destiny,—to found an empire of mind and reason—to destroy the dominion of rude physical power as the ruler of the world. Do this, and ye shall be worthy of your descent from us.



“With these voices mingle the spirits of your later fathers—of those who fell in the second struggle for freedom of religion and of faith. ‘Save our honour too,’ they call. To us it had not become wholly clear what we fought for; besides our just determination to suffer no outward power to control us in matters of conscience, we were also impelled by a higher spirit, which never wholly unveiled itself to our view. To you this spirit is no longer veiled, if you have vision for the spiritual world;—it now regards you with high clear aspect. The confused and intricate mixture of sensuous and spiritual impulses shall no longer be permitted to govern the world. Mind alone, pure from all admixture of sense, shall assume the guidance of human affairs. In order that this spirit should have liberty to develop itself, and rise to independent existence, our blood was shed. It lies with you to give a meaning and a justification to the sacrifice, by establishing this spirit in its destined supremacy. Should this result not ensue, as the ultimate end of all the previous development of our nation, then were our struggles but a vain and forgotten farce, and the freedom of mind and conscience for which we fought an empty word, since neither mind nor conscience should any longer have a place among us.

“The races yet unborn plead with you. ‘Ye were proud of your forefathers,’ they cry, and proudly ranked yourselves in a noble line of men. See that with you the chain is not broken. Act so that we also may be proud of you; and through you, as through a spotless medium, claim our descent from the same glorious source. Be not you the cause of making us revile our ancestry, as low, barbarous, and slavish; of causing us to hide our origin, or to assume a foreign name and a foreign parentage, in order that we may not be, without further inquiry, cast aside and trodden under foot. According as the next generation which proceed from you shall be, so shall be your future fame; honourable, if this shall bear honourable witness to you; beyond measure ignominious, if ye have not an unblemished posterity to succeed you, and leave it to your conqueror to write your history. Never

has a victor been known to have either the inclination or the means of passing a just judgment on the subdued. The more he degrades them, the better does he justify his own position. Who can know what great deeds, what excellent institutions, what noble manners of many nations of antiquity, may have passed away into oblivion, because their succeeding generations have been enslaved, and have left the conqueror in his own way, and without contradiction, to tell their story?

“Even the stranger in foreign lands pleads with you, in so far as he understands himself, and knows aright his own interest. Yes! there are in every nation minds who can never believe that the great promises to the human race of a kingdom of law, of reason, of truth, are vain and idle delusions, and who therefore cherish the conviction that the present iron age is but a step towards a better state. These, and with them all the after-ages of humanity, trust in you. Many of them trace their lineage from us; others have received from us religion and all other culture. Those plead with us, by the common soil of our Fatherland, the cradle of their infancy, which they have left to us free; these, by the culture which they have accepted from us as the pledge of a higher good,—to maintain, for their sakes, the proud position which has hitherto been ours, to guard with jealous watchfulness against even the possible disappearance, from the great confederation of a newly arisen humanity, of that member which is to them more important than all others; or that when they shall need our counsel, our example, our co-operation in the pursuit and attainment of the true end of this earthly life, they shall not look around for us in vain.

“All ages,—all the wise and good who have ever breathed the air of this world of ours,—all their thoughts and aspirations towards a higher good,—mingle with these voices and encompass you about and raise suppliant hands towards you;—Providence itself, if we may venture so to speak, and the Divine plan in the creation of a human race—which indeed exists only that it may be understood of men, and by

men be wrought into reality—plead with you to save their honour and their existence. Whether those who have believed that humanity must ever advance in a course of ceaseless improvement, and that the great ideas of its order and worth were not empty dreams but the prophetic announcement and pledge of their future realisation ;—whether those—or they who have slumbered on in the sluggish indolence of a mere vegetable or animal existence, and mocked every aspiration towards a higher world—have had the right,—this is the question upon which it has fallen to your lot to furnish a last and decisive answer. The ancient world, with all its nobility and greatness, has fallen—through its own unworthiness and through the might of your forefathers. If there has been truth in that which I have spoken to you in these ‘Addresses,’ then it is you to whom, out of all other modern nations, the germs of human perfection are especially committed, and on whom the foremost place in the onward advance towards their development is conferred. If you sink to nothing in this your peculiar office, then with you the hopes of Humanity for salvation out of all its evils are likewise overthrown. Hope not, console not yourselves with the vain delusion, that a second time, after the destruction of an ancient civilisation, a new culture will arise upon the ruins of the old from a half-barbaric people. In ancient times, such a people existed fully provided with all the requisites for their mission ; they were well known to the cultivated nation, and were described in its literature ; and that nation itself, had it been able to suppose the case of its own downfall, might have discovered the means of renovation in this people. To us also the whole surface of the earth is well known, and all the nations who dwell upon it. Do we know one, of all the ancestral tribe of modern Europe, of whom like hopes may be entertained ? I think that every man who does not give himself up to visionary hopes and fancies, but desires only honest and searching inquiry, must answer this question—No ! There is, then, no way of escape : if ye sink, Humanity sinks with you, without hope of future restoration.”

With much that is over-strained and fantastic, much that is indefinite and unpractical, the 'Addresses' yet spoke to Germans as they had not been spoken to since the time of Luther. The idea of the unity of the German people began in them to be detached from the old ideal of the Holy Empire, and to link itself on to the history of the race, and above all to the history of the strongest German State, to the history of Prussia. The most interesting facts in the troubled narrative of this troubled period are the rise and growth of the strong feeling of nationality, and the development of a more definite opposition between the older forms of German imperial union and the new conception of a national unity,—an opposition practically expressing itself in the antithesis between Austria with the Kaiserate and Prussia with the German Confederation. It is true that the smaller German States, especially those of the south and west, remained long unaffected by the new movement, and hence it becomes intelligible how the old history of internal dissension began to reappear in Germany so soon as the foreign yoke had been thrown off. Nevertheless it is to this time the historian must look for the first foreshadowings of the form of German unity which has slowly been wrought out in the later years of the present century.

Shortly after the delivery of the 'Addresses,' Fichte was struck down by the first illness which had seriously affected him. Even his iron constitution had suffered from the fatigue of the months of exile from Berlin, from the anxiety and distress which continuously accompanied him. The public lectures on philosophy, for which he had prepared himself in the spring of 1808, were given

up; and for some months he resided at Teplitz, where the warm baths restored, though not completely, his shattered health.

During this time an important step in the regeneration of Prussia had been under debate. When the Halle University had been closed after the defeat of Jena, the professors made proposals to the king that the seat of the university should be transferred to Berlin. This proposition was the occasion for the serious and mature consideration of the advisability of having in Berlin a national university. To Beyme, then Minister of Instruction, the commission was given to make the preliminary arrangements for such a step, and, on his invitation, Fichte sent in an elaborate and carefully constructed plan for the new institution.<sup>1</sup> Although the university as it was eventually organised resembled in little or nothing Fichte's ideal, the details of his scheme present some points of interest.

The true function of a university, according to the 'Deduced Plan,' has not been in general rightly apprehended. It is not the communication of knowledge by means of lectures, for, were this the aim, university work would be better performed by a large collection of books. The university is the crown or apex of the system of education, whereby the whole powers of the individual are to be trained to their highest form of exercise. A university is, in brief, a school for training in the art of using the understanding scientifically. All details of

<sup>1</sup> "Deducirter Plan einer zu Berlin zu errichtenden höheren Lehranstalt," 'Werke,' vol. viii. pp. 95-204. With this should be compared his "Ideas on the Internal Organisation of the University of Erlangen," 'Nachgel. Werke,' vol. iii. pp. 275-295.



the organisation, as far as teaching is concerned, follow from this general principle. Thus the lecture method must be relinquished in favour of combined dialogue, examination, and practice in themes or theses. The scholars, who are destined to fulfil a high aim in the state, who are to represent culture and intelligence, must be carefully prepared in the preliminary school-education, must be isolated from all the details of life, and must have the means of support secured to them. The university will itself form a seminary or training-school for professors.

From this general conception Fichte proceeds to work out the details—first as regards the organisation of studies in a university, then as regards the distribution of scholars and teachers, their economy and relation to the state, and finally as regards the mode in which a university so constituted may actively influence the scientific world. In his treatment of the first subject, we have to note the occurrence of an error extremely frequent in the case of systematic theorists. Fichte thinks that in all branches of study the beginning should be found in a kind of encyclopædic introduction; and that for all branches of study at a university, the common introduction is to be found in philosophy. Accordingly, the first year of study is arranged to be passed under the care of one professor of philosophy, who, without inculcating any system, shall train the students to reflection in the nature of the problems of thought and knowledge, shall indicate to them how the special sciences branch off from philosophy, and shall give literary and critical notices by way of introduction. When this first course is completed, the studies are then separated according to the broad divisions of philology, philosophy, history,

and natural science. The old division of faculties in no way corresponds to the guiding principle of university training, that it shall deal with the scientific use of the understanding. Law, *e.g.*, is on the one side professional merely; on the other, when it has a scientific aspect, it falls under history and philosophy. Medicine, in so far as scientific, rests upon, and should be included under, natural science. Theology, in like manner, must be distributed partly to philology, partly to philosophy, partly to history, of which last a most important chapter ought to be "the history of the development of religious notions among mankind." In the case of each special line of study, the course begins with an encyclopædic introduction, and passes on to the more definite and thorough work of detail.

The students Fichte regards as divisible into two grand classes. Those who, by the exercises of their first course, have proved themselves fit to follow out the profession of the scholar, are the *Regulars*,—the very kernel of the university, for whom and by whom it peculiarly exists. They are to be distinguished not only by the economical arrangements for their maintenance, but even by a special academic garb. From their ranks are drawn the members of the professoriate; and Fichte, it may be remarked, is emphatically of opinion that such members should be young, and should not continue too long in office. All other students—those who use the university merely as an addition to their ordinary civic life—are called *Associates*, among whom some may be regarded as aspirants to the dignity of the *Regulars*, and are therefore called *Novices*.

Into the arrangements for the government of the uni-

versity, for the payment of teachers and the support of scholars, Fichte enters at great length, but his treatment presents little or nothing of interest. One cannot avoid a feeling of surprise at the one-sided vision which could see no possible evil in the reinstatement of a cloister-life as the substitute for the freer academic air of a university. More attractive is his discussion of the methods whereby the scientific training-school is to influence the surrounding world. The organised force of the university is to manifest itself in the continuous production of three sets of records or *Acta*: first, a Journal of Scientific Art, in a peculiar sense the *Acta literaria* of the university, in which the produce of the university work, including the theses of the students, shall be incorporated; second, a periodical publication, containing on the one hand abstracts of the encyclopædic surveys which form the propædæutic to all scientific teaching, and on the other records of all additions to scientific knowledge made in the university; finally, a critical journal, which shall serve as a guide to all new scientific publications—a journal of the progress of literature.

Fichte's scheme, discussed with the utmost care in Beyme's house by a circle of men interested in the foundation of the new institution, appeared to contain too many novelties to permit of its acceptance. His old opponent, Schleiermacher, published in the following year (1808) his 'Occasional Thoughts on Universities in a German sense,' which was undoubtedly intended as a counterpoise to the 'Deduced Plan;' and the organisation finally adopted more nearly resembles Schleiermacher's suggested modification of existing arrangements than

Fichte's thoroughly radical and comprehensive scheme. For some years the carrying out of the intention to found the new university was delayed. Stein, when in power, was unwilling to hurry matters, and had, for a time, some objections to Berlin as the seat of an academic institution. Not till 1809 was the affair handed over to W. von Humboldt, with instructions to have it carried out. Lectures were delivered in that year by Fichte, Schleiermacher, Savigny, Wolf, Klaproth, and others, which were in fact, though not in form, systematic university courses. The formal opening was made in the autumn of 1810, and Schmalz, formerly of Halle, was named first rector. An unusual number of the most eminent men in literature and science had been collected in Berlin during the preceding years, many of whom—*e.g.*, F. A. Wolf and Buttman—though not actually professors in the university, yet, as members of the Academy of Sciences, contributed by lectures and otherwise to the success of the new undertaking. Among the great names associated with the Berlin University in the early years of its existence, one notes Fichte, Schleiermacher, Savigny, I. Bekker, Aug. Böckh, Marheineke, Neander, Eichhorn, De Wette, Solger, Ideler, Klaproth, Rühls, Schmalz, and Rudolphi;—altogether a constellation of brilliant stars, shedding lustre on the youngest of the German academies.

In 1810 Fichte opened his course with the important lectures, first published in 1817, on the 'Facts of Conscientiousness.'<sup>1</sup> The new mode of viewing the system of philosophy which is there presented was worked out in greater completeness, though not, one must confess, with

<sup>1</sup> 'Werke,' vol. ii. pp. 541-691.

greater clearness, in the lectures of 1812 on 'Wissenschaftslehre,' and on 'Transcendental Logic,'<sup>1</sup> and in those of 1813 on 'Wissenschaftslehre,' on the 'Theory of Law,' on 'Ethics,' and on the 'Facts of Consciousness.'<sup>2</sup> In these lectures one finds much difficulty in recognising the brilliant expositor of the earlier 'Wissenschaftslehre.' Fichte labours with harsh and forced metaphors to make clear his new conception of the whole intelligible world, of which knowledge is but an imperfect fragment; but over the entire exposition there hangs an air of obscurity and mysticism foreign to his original mode of thinking, and rendering comprehension of his meaning unusually hard. It is evident, indeed, from the continuous repetitions, from the over-anxiety to clear up fundamental points, that the system itself was not in all precision of outline before the mind of the author. The true cause of this obscurity we shall afterwards have to consider; but it must be said that, however important are these lectures in the development of Fichte's own thought, they have had no significance in the history of speculation as a whole. His contributions to the progress of German philosophy must be looked for in the works published by him, and mainly in those of the Jena period.

As at Jena, so here at Berlin, we have to observe how difficult it was for Fichte's impetuous temper to accept any situation save that of supreme ruler. His strong ideas on university organisation, in particular his desire by the most stringent penalties to suppress the corrup-

<sup>1</sup> 'Nachgel. Werke,' vol. ii. pp. 317-492; vol. i. pp. 103-400.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., vol. i. pp. 1-102; vol. ii. pp. 493-652; vol. iii. pp. 1-118; vol. i. pp. 401-574.



tions of student life, led to constant and unseemly conflicts with his colleagues. At Michaelmas 1811 he had been elected rector of the university for the ensuing year, but after four months of office he resigned, finding it impossible to deal after his own fashion with university affairs, while hampered by the constant opposition of the senate. That the fault was altogether on the side of his colleagues cannot be admitted. Fichte's natural impatience was probably aggravated by ill health, for he had never quite recovered from his one serious illness; and, if we may judge from a passage in one of Solger's letters, his general demeanour was little calculated to produce harmony in an academic body. "Fichte," writes Solger, "makes our very existence bitter by his mode of acting,—not only by his paradoxical whims and real absurdities, but by his obstinacy and egotism. Continuously to overawe by declaring, 'Not I as an individual say or desire this, but the Idea which speaks and acts through me,' is certainly a fine mode of speech, in which I willingly recognise true and honest zeal. But when he proceeds in all matters, the greatest or the least, from the axiom that the Idea has selected but one organ—viz., Herr Fichte himself—it does appear to me that individuality becomes simple despotism. He has no measure in anything; for the smallest fault he treats the students as though they were imps of hell. He pays no regard to the spirit of any law or regulation, but will have the very letter, of which his interpretation is often most ludicrous. The *dementia* which is mingled with his *ingenium* is really childlike. On the other hand, where one of his whims is in question, he will take the most astounding liberties with either letter or spirit of a

law. Is he out-voted? he will not carry out the resolution of the senate, hunts up the most ridiculous reasons in order to find some formal error, and, if this be unsuccessful, appeals to the Government. Moreover, he has a band of students, his devoted scholars, who have been infected with his accursed desire to regenerate the world. These fellows make the most shameless representations to the senate, and Fichte transmits them directly to the department without communicating them to us as the real academic government, gives on his own authority an answer to the students, and justifies them against the senate."<sup>1</sup>

### 3.—WAR OF LIBERATION: DEATH OF FICHTE.

The close of the year 1812 was a notable epoch in European history. In December the fragments of Napoleon's great army, broken and shattered in the Russian campaign, reached Wilna, and the scattered bands began to retrace their steps through German territory with a Russian army following close upon them. The magic influence of the great conqueror seemed to have received its death-blow, and throughout all Europe began a general stir and commotion. In Prussia more especially, weak and dispirited as she then appeared to be,—for her army was numerically small, her fortresses and chief towns still in the hands of the invader,—it was felt that the time at last had come for a decisive effort towards independence. An indescribable enthusiasm, hardly to be restrained from premature and fatal outbreak, agitated the whole people. The nation and the army, in the most eager excitement, waited with impa-

<sup>1</sup> From Noack, 'J. G. Fichte's Leben,' &c., pp. 541, 542.

tience for some movement on the part of their sovereign. The wisest and most prudent heads perceived how necessary it was for the future of Prussia and of Germany that their deliverance should not be left passively to the exertions of the Russian power. Only by vigorous and united action could Prussia hope to regain her position among the Powers of Europe. Events had been to a certain extent precipitated by the independent action of some of the leaders—*e.g.*, by Yorek's secession from the French army and conclusion of the famous Convention of Tauroggen; but it was needful that the work should be taken in hand by the nation itself, and that the king should be compelled to act with rapidity and vigour. The flight of the king in February to Breslau, where he was in comparative freedom from French control, was the first decisive step, for it thus became possible for him to assent openly to the alliance with Russia, already initiated independently of him by Yorek and Stein.<sup>1</sup> On the 28th of the same month was concluded the Treaty of Kalisch, whereby the two Powers, Russia and Prussia, bound themselves to carry on in concert the war against their common enemy. On the 2d March the Russians crossed the Oder, and were followed, on the 10th, by the Prussian troops. On the 16th the formal declaration of war was made, and on the ensuing day the king issued his famous "Summons to my people." The appeal was nobly responded to. From every quarter, from every rank of society, recruits and volunteers poured in. The universities were emptied of

<sup>1</sup> The troubled movements of this important time are narrated with great fulness and precision in Seeley's 'Life and Times of Stein,' vol. iii. pp. 1-103.

their students, even the gymnasia sent their *Primaner* to the front. Scharnhorst's great war-mechanism began to appear in its true form, and those who from age or other cause were unable to serve in the ranks, enrolled themselves in the *Landsturm*, and prepared to play their part in the struggle for national independence.

To Fichte this wonderful upheaval of the Prussian people presented itself in its great historical aspects as the typical contest between the principles of reason and self-will, and as the means by which the long-desired unity of the German nation might be achieved. On the 19th February 1813, he closed his winter course of philosophical lectures with an eloquent address to the students, encouraging them in their heroic devotion, and emphasising the noble character of the work on which they were about to enter.<sup>1</sup> In the summer of the same year he delivered to such audience as could be gathered in the *auditorium* of the university, the lectures "On the idea of a just war" (afterwards incorporated in the posthumous 'Staats-lehre'), in which he characterised with force and eloquence the significance of a national war, and contrasted the idea for which the German people was about to contend with the principles of their great foe.<sup>2</sup> By this contest, it appeared to him, the unity of the German people might be attained sooner than had previously seemed possible. For, as he pointedly declares in the remarkable 'Political Fragment from the year 1813,' "a nation becomes a nation through war and through a common struggle. Who shares not in the present war can by no decree be incorporated in

<sup>1</sup> 'Werke,' vol. iv. pp. 603-610.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. iv. pp. 401-430.

the German nation.”<sup>1</sup> As was natural, his tendency to regard Prussia as the kernel and destined head of the united German people received fresh strength from the events of the time, for Prussia alone seemed to show the genuine enthusiasm of a nation struggling for its existence. In brief aphoristic fashion the ‘Political Fragment’ passes in review the claims of the several chief states, Prussia, Austria, and Saxony, to the headship of Germany, and the balance is inclined strongly towards Prussia.<sup>2</sup>

A more active part than by the lectures it was not permitted to him to take. Again, as in the war of 1806, he proposed to the Government that he should exercise his oratorical powers on the army directly, but again his request was declined. He remained in Berlin, practising the military exercises in the *Landsturm*, and resuming, in the winter of 1813, his ordinary courses of lectures at the university.

The current of the war, which at first threatened Berlin, had been diverted from the capital by the victories of Gross-Beeren and Dennewitz, but the numerous combats in the immediate vicinity of the city had left a sad legacy in hospitals overcrowded with sick and wounded. The civic authorities, unable with the means at their disposal to cope with the unusual burden imposed upon them, appealed for aid to the citizens, and especially solicited the assistance of women for the work of nursing. Among the first who offered their services

<sup>1</sup> ‘Werke,’ vol. vii. p. 550.

<sup>2</sup> Fichte’s view on this interesting point is noted, but given somewhat too positively, in Von Treitschke’s historical eulogy of Prussia, ‘Deutsche Geschichte im 19ten Jahrhundert.’ See Bd. i. p. 436.



was the wife of Fichte, and throughout the winter months of 1813 she laboured incessantly in the hospitals. On the 3d January of the following year she was struck down by a serious, apparently fatal, nervous fever. Her husband, then opening a new course of philosophical lectures, attended constantly on her during the day, and left her only in the evening for his class-room. The crisis had hardly been passed, and hope entertained of her recovery, when the same disease struck down his strong frame. For eleven days he lingered, with but few intervals of clear consciousness, his sleep becoming ever deeper, till on the night of the 27th January all sign of life gradually vanished. He was buried in the first churchyard before the Oranienburg gate in Berlin ; at his side now lie the remains of Hegel and Solger. Five years later his wife was laid at his feet. On the tall obelisk which marks his grave is the inscription from the Book of Daniel : "The teachers shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars that shine for ever and ever."

In person Fichte was short and strongly made ; the head massive, with pronounced features, keen and piercing eyes, thick and dark hair. In all his movements, as in his actions, he was quick, impetuous, and strong. His life lies before us as the manifestation of a powerful and heroic spirit, marked by clearness of insight and resoluteness of conviction, and animated by the loftiest ethical feeling. His errors are truly the defects of these great qualities.

## CHAPTER V.

## GENERAL IDEA OF FICHTE'S PHILOSOPHY.

THE philosophy of Fichte attaches itself, by a kind of natural necessity, to that of Kant, of which it is an extension and development, and in relation to which it has its special significance. The difficulties in the way of obtaining a summary view of its nature and tendency are thus, for the general reader, increased. From the peculiar form of the system, it is not at all possible to effect an easy entrance into it; but the closeness of its connection with the Kantian philosophy renders it necessary not only that the reader should become acquainted with the specific character of the critical method, with the point of view from which the problems of speculative thought are regarded in all later German systems, but also that he should have a sufficient grasp of the details of the critical philosophy to appreciate what is peculiar in Fichte's advance upon it. Of these fundamental requisites for comprehension of Fichte's doctrine, the first is the more important,—even, one may say, the more essential. The English student who has been accustomed to the analytical and psychological method of Berkeley, or Hume, or Mill, or even to the more de-

veloped forms of recent realistic or scientific thinking, as in Spencer, finds himself, as it were, in a new world, when he is brought into contact with the Kantian and post-Kantian speculations—a world in which at first sight all appears to be inverted or reversed. Apparent inversion, as we know, may arise either from the position of the things themselves, or from the inverted view of the observer; and the extraordinary difference between the English and the later German philosophy is merely the result of the fundamental difference in point of view from which they contemplate philosophical questions. The problems with which both are engaged are of necessity the same—no philosophy is ever new—but the methods employed are radically divergent, and not without careful analysis and criticism can they be brought within sight of one another. It is indispensable, in attempting to give a systematic account of one phase of German speculation, that we should endeavour to make clear the characteristic feature which distinguishes that mode of thought, and we can hardly do so without comparing it to some extent with the prevailing type of English philosophy. So soon as the point of view and method of treatment have become clear, we are in a position to consider the problems to which the speculative method must be applied, and thus to obtain a preliminary outline or general conception of the whole system. This, in the first instance, is what we propose to undertake, leaving to the more detailed account of the system the second introductory subject—the contents or results of the Kantian philosophy.

If we consider what is involved in the descriptive adjectives which have been applied to what may be

called the current English philosophy, we shall be able to discover, by mere force of contrast, some of the most important characteristics of the Kantian method of speculative research. Historically, indeed, the Kantian method was an attempt to revise what had appeared as the final result of English philosophy; and though the later post-Kantian writers make little or no reference to English thought, the connection between the two is not to be overlooked. A more fruitful conception of the aim and function of speculative thinking is to be obtained by working towards Kant from the position of Locke and Hume than from that of Leibnitz, important as the influence of the latter undoubtedly was. The English philosophy, we have said, may be distinguished as prevaillingly analytical or psychological in method. In other words, if it be regarded as the primary and all-comprehensive function of philosophy to render intelligible the whole of experience, to give a systematic and reasoned account of all that enters into the life of the human thinking being, then the method of Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and their successors, proposes to supply answers to the various problems into which this one comprehensive inquiry divides itself, by an analysis of the conscious experience of the thinking subject, by a complete psychology of human nature. Conscious experience, that of which the individual subject becomes aware as making up his existence, is regarded as material upon which the processes of observation, classification, analysis, employed to good purpose in physical inquiries, are to be directed. At first sight, indeed, such a method appears not merely natural, but the only possible way in which a philosophical theory, granting such to be feas-

ible, can be constructed. For is not a philosophical theory a kind of knowledge? And how otherwise than by investigation of the contents of mind can we arrive at any conclusions regarding the nature and limits of knowledge? "It surely needs no argumentation," says a distinguished exponent of the view, "to show that the problem, What can we know? cannot be approached without the examination of the contents of the mind, and the determination of how much of these contents may be called knowledge."<sup>1</sup> Since that which stands in need of explanation is experience itself, we evidently cannot explain it otherwise than by looking at it. To look beyond experience is absurd; there is evidently nothing left but the examination of experience, and to this philosophy must needs be confined.

It may here be remarked that any difference between the philosophical methods under comparison does not arise concerning the restriction of knowledge to experience. Fichte as well as Kant is aware that philosophy has only to *think* experience, that it in no way adds to experience, and that it must contain nothing beyond experience. "I declare," he writes in one of the most popular of his expositions, "the very innermost spirit and soul of my philosophy to be, that man has nothing beyond experience, and that he obtains all that he has, from experience, from life only. All his thinking, whether vague or scientific, whether popular or transcendental, proceeds from experience and concerns nothing but experience."<sup>2</sup> Any divergence arises, not from dis-

<sup>1</sup> Huxley's 'Hume,' p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> "Sonnenklarer Bericht," 'Werke,' vol. ii. p. 333. Cf. 'Werke,' vol. ii. pp. 9, 10, 123, 395; vol. v. pp. 340-344.



agreement respecting the quite empty proposition, that there is nothing beyond experience, but from some difference in conception of experience and in the method of dealing with it. Critical examination often shows that under an apparently simple question or statement a whole theory lies concealed, and that the inferences drawn follow not from the fact contained in the query or proposition, but from the underlying theory. Thus, in the case in point, the restriction of philosophical inquiry to experience has always meant, to writers of the English school, that phenomena of inner and outer life are known in the same way, and that beyond the knowledge thus obtained there is nothing standing in need of investigation or capable of being investigated. "Psychology," says the writer previously referred to, "differs from physical science only in the nature of its subject-matter, and not in its method of investigation."<sup>1</sup>

English philosophy thus starts with a definite conception of the nature and limits of speculative inquiry. Experience, inner and outer, is equally matter for scientific treatment; and the results of such treatment form, on the one hand, natural science strictly so called—on the other, mental science, of which certain generalised propositions make up the substance of philosophy. It is not putting the matter too strongly to say that the categorical rejection of this psychological method is the very essence of the critical philosophy, the key-note of the critical spirit in speculation. For Kant, as for Fichte, psychology is a science or doctrine subordinate to philosophy proper, involving in its method assumptions which it is the very business of philosophy to dis-

<sup>1</sup> Huxley's 'Hume,' p. 51.

cuss, and employing notions which it is the function of philosophy to criticise. So far from speculative principles being generalisations from psychological data, they are antecedent to the establishment of such data as facts of experience. The *naïve* doctrine that since cognition is an aspect or form of conscious experience, its nature, extent, and validity are to be considered by investigating it according to the rules of scientific method,—just as we should investigate an object presented in outer experience,—is not to be identified with the truth which the most metaphysical thinker acknowledges, that only by thought can thought be tested and examined. The special lesson of the critical philosophy is that the assumption of a distinction of the whole field of experience into the two realms of objective facts and of subjective facts itself requires examination and defence. We must consider what the significance of such a distinction is for the conscious subject within whose experience it presents itself, and under what conditions it can be recognised by him. Were we to begin our philosophical analysis, as psychology must begin, with the distinction as in some way a fact given, and assume simply that the thinking subject is confronted with two orders of phenomena to be interpreted through the same notions, we should commit a twofold error. For, on the one hand, while in words we appear to assert that the two orders of facts make up all that is, we have in reality placed alongside of them, in a quite inexplicable fashion, the thinking subject or mind, a *tertium quid* which certainly stands in need of some explanation; and, on the other hand, the qualities and relations discoverable among facts, when contemplated

as matters of observation for the thinking subject, are only such as appear to a supposed external observer, and not their qualities and relations for the intelligence whose very substance they compose. We voluntarily abstract from the essential feature of the problem, the existence of the conscious subject *for* whom the orders of facts are there present, and must therefore recognise that any conclusions from investigation of the facts have validity only in subordination to the abstraction from which we start. Thus psychology, as ordinarily conceived—the scientific account of the phenomena to be observed in consciousness, the description, analysis, and history of mental phenomena—stands on precisely the same level as the natural sciences, and like them, leaves out of consideration the problem with which philosophy as such has to deal. Even the analysis of mental states, which forms a portion of psychological treatment, is the analysis of them as facts of observation,—that is, the determination of the conditions on which their occurrence depends, the separation of simpler and more complex states, and the formulation of general laws of coexistence and succession, not the analysis of their significance as elements of the cognitive or moral experience of a conscious subject. The fundamental notions which we apply in psychological research are those of all scientific method, and concern objects—*i.e.*, things regarded as existing in conjunction and mutual interdependence. Their very applicability, therefore, depends on the resolution of the prior questions as to the significance of knowledge of any thing or object, and the relations involved therein. Such prior questions may be called, in Kantian phraseology, transcendental, and the whole

method by which they are treated the transcendental method. The substitution of this transcendental method for the earlier abstract metaphysics, and for the prevalingly psychological fashion of dealing with philosophical problems, is, in brief, Kant's contribution to modern thought.<sup>1</sup>

The fundamental difference between the psychological method of dealing with philosophical problems, the method which regards the states of mind as so many definite objects for a conscious observer, and the transcendental method, which proposes for consideration the conditions under which knowledge of a thing is possible for a thinking subject and the significance of such knowledge, appears with great clearness in the philosophical system of Berkeley—a system in which both methods may be discerned, though neither receives precise expression, and the combination seems to have remained unobserved by the author. Berkeley's thinking is in so many ways typical of the English spirit, his idealism has affected so much of current speculation, and his position in the general development of modern philosophy is so peculiar, that it is worth while here to scrutinise somewhat closely the principles upon which he proceeded.

Beyond all question, Berkeley started, in his philoso-

<sup>1</sup> The term *transcendental* probably has, for English ears, an unpleasant ring, and will suggest metaphysical efforts to transcend experience. It must be understood, however, that *transcendental* method is simply the patient and rigorous analysis of experience itself. For any question or theorem which might pass beyond possible experience, Kant reserved the term *transcendent*; and the distinction, if not the mode of expressing it, is accepted by all his successors. Neither in Kant nor in Fichte is there anything in the slightest degree resembling what is commonly called metaphysics.

phical analysis, with a doctrine which in terms may be regarded as identical with the principle of the transcendental method. He proposed to investigate philosophical notions or terms in the light of the doctrine, that no fact can possibly be admitted which is not a fact for some conscious subject. Every metaphysical theorem or notion must be subjected to the same test, reduction of its terms to the experience of a thinking being. His attack on abstractions is thus virtually identical with the Kantian criticism of things-in-themselves. For Berkeley an abstraction is a supposed fact of experience which from its nature cannot possibly form part of the experience of a conscious subject. If we remove from a fact those relations or qualifications through which only it enters into and forms portion of the conscious experience of some subject, we have as result an *abstractum* or contradiction,—something supposed to be a possible object of experience, and yet at the same time wanting in the qualities requisite for any such object. Material substance as distinct from the varied and specifically qualified material things, unqualified matter as the cause of objective phenomena, things as existing out of relation to conscious intelligence, abstract ideas of facts of experience, are instances of such abstraction. Berkeley's demand that, before discussing problems as to matter, cause, substance, and other metaphysical notions, we shall first determine what they mean for us, has the true note of the transcendental method.

On the other hand, it is equally beyond doubt that Berkeley, under the influence of Locke's philosophy, accepted as the criterion of the possibility of entrance into the conscious experience of a subject, the possibility



of forming one fact of observation in the observed sum of states making up conscious experience. In his view, as in that of Locke, existence for a self-conscious subject meant individual or particular existence as an object of internal observation. Thus from the outset he united in one system the transcendental and the psychological methods, and the history of the development of his thoughts is an instructive record of the struggle between the two principles. The manifold inconsistencies which criticism discloses in his doctrine are natural results of the attempt, however unconscious, to combine two radically incompatible views.

Berkeley's earliest reflections, those contained in the 'Commonplace Book,' discovered and published by Professor Fraser, are dominated throughout by the individualist notion which is part of the psychological method. He is even disposed at times to reject his underlying doctrine of the necessary implication of subject and object, and to regard mind itself as but a collection of particular ideas, as, indeed, mind necessarily is, for internal observation. In the first formal stage of his philosophy, the stage represented by the 'Principles,' the most characteristic features are due to the steady application of the individualist criterion. It seems evident to him that to the observer, regarded as standing apart from conscious experience, nothing can be presented but isolated, single states, connected externally or contingently, containing in themselves no reference to underlying substance or cause, and existing only as facts for an observer. The result is one aspect, unfortunately almost the only aspect known, of the Berkeleian idealism. Existence is the sum of states making up the experience

of the individual ; there is nothing beyond the mind and its own phenomena. From such a mere subjective fancy no philosophical aid is to be found for resolving any of the harder problems of thought. As the matter is well put by Dr Stirling : "The same things that were called *without* or *noumenal*, are now called *within* and *phenomenal* ; but, call them as you may, it is their systematic explanation that is wanted. Such systematic explanation, embracing man and the entire round of his experiences, sensuous, intellectual, moral, religious, æsthetical, political, &c., is alone philosophy, and to that no repetition of *without is within*, or *matter is phenomenal*, will ever prove adequate."<sup>1</sup> In short, the slightest reflection enables one to see that the most airy subjective idealism and the crassest materialism are one and the same. In both cases we are left with the mere statement that things are what they are, and it matters not whether we call them ideas or forms of matter.

This, however, is but one side of Berkeley's so-called idealism. Although, while developing from the individualist principle, he could arrive at no other conclusion than that experience consists in the isolated states of the individual thinker, yet it seemed to him equally clear that the conscious subject could not be regarded as merely one of the objects of internal observation. The independent existence and activity of the conscious self were therefore admitted by him as somehow beyond experience in the narrow sense, and in a very confused fashion he proceeded to ask what the significance of experience could be for such a self-conscious subject. His answer, given briefly and without adequate investigation of its

<sup>1</sup> "Annotations" to Schwegeler's 'History of Philosophy,' p. 419.

real ground, was practically that for such a subject conscious experience must present itself as a conditioned and dependent fact, as a series of accidents of which intelligence or mind is the substance, as a series of effects of which intelligence or mind is the cause. Thus the psychological idealism, reached by application of the one method, was transformed by application of the other into a species of objective or theological idealism. The conception of a mere flux of conscious states was converted into the more complex notion of an intelligible system—a world of free and independent spirits, whose modes of action and passion are the several modifications of actual experience as known to us. Finite minds are related to one another and to the Infinite Mind by mutual action and reaction. The course of nature is the result of the operation of the Divine Mind on finite intelligences.

A notion like this is essentially what Kant and Fichte call “dogmatic.”<sup>1</sup> It implies or starts from the assumption of an absolute opposition between two orders of real existences, the finite and the infinite mind, and endeavours to explain their reconciliation or conjunction by means of a conception which has validity only for the diverse objects of one conscious subject. A conscious subject can only think the objects which make up his experience as mutually determining, for only so do they compose *one* experience. To transfer this notion to the possible relations of infinite and finite intelligences, which by supposition are not mere objects for mind, is to make an invalid, or technically, a transcendent use of it. No

<sup>1</sup> See for Fichte’s vigorous criticism of Berkeley, ‘*Werke*,’ vol. i. pp. 438, 439.

ingenuity can render a finite and relative notion like that of causal action, or of mutual determination, adequate to express the possible connection between experience and the ground of all possible experience. God and the world are not to be thought as respectively cause and effect.

The Berkeleian theological idealism thus yields no solution of the problem it was intended to answer. It is simply a translation into the language of idealism of the popular view that the experience of the conscious subject is due to some action from without; and if no further analysis be given, it is not of the slightest consequence, philosophically, whether we say that God is the cause of the varied character of conscious experience, or that things in themselves are the cause. In both cases we have started with the conception of the finite, self-existent mind, and explain its experience as communicated to it from without. Such a mere fashion of speech makes clear neither what the significance of "coming from without" can be for an intelligence possessing only subjective states, nor how the notion of "without" can possibly arise in its consciousness, nor how it comes to regard itself as finite, and to refer for explanation to an Infinite Mind.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One of these unanswered difficulties suggests the reason for the close similarity which has been found between Berkeley and Leibnitz. From Berkeley's subjective or psychological point of view, the criterion of objectivity is want of consciousness of productive power on the part of the thinking subject. Now evidently, in the absence of other grounds, objectivity of this sort might be accounted for by reference to unconscious acts of production on the part of the subject, as well as by action from without. Experience would thus be the evolution of the thinking subject; inner and outer would imply only differences in the conscious activity of the subject; the Berkeleian finite mind would be identical with the Leibnitzian monad.

The later stages of Berkeley's thinking show the gradual perception on his part of the deficiencies in his earlier doctrine. On the one hand, it became increasingly apparent that the results of the psychological method required to be qualified or limited by reference to the counter-conception of the conscious subject as in no sense a possible object of conscious experience : on the other hand, it began to appear doubtful to Berkeley how far any worth or validity could be ascribed to the psychological method. He had assumed throughout his earlier inquiry that to the supposed external observer, whether our own mind or not, the facts of conscious experience would present themselves as a contingent series or stream ; but it now occurred to him that in so doing, he had simply cast into the mind of this external observer all that was required to render knowledge possible, all that must be investigated before we can determine what knowledge really is. Thus, in 'Alciphron,' stress is laid upon the fact that Self is not an *idea*—*i.e.*, not an object of observation ; and on the analogy of this, the wider inference is rested, that many intellectual principles may likewise have validity, although what they refer to can in no sense be reduced to *ideas*, or isolated individual elements of conscious experience. In 'Siris,' Berkeley begins to point out that the stream of contingent facts of experience is not a datum requiring merely to be observed, but is possible material of knowledge only for an intelligence which combines the scattered parts in relations not included in the conception of them as mere objects. In fact, in the latest stage of his philosophical development, it becomes evident to him that the so-called simple ideas of Locke are really concrete



and complex units of cognition ; and that sense, so far from furnishing a kind of knowledge, supplies only elements, which for a thinking subject are possible material of knowledge.

Berkeley's doctrine has been considered in some detail, partly because no subsequent English philosophical thinking seems to have advanced beyond his position, partly because one can discern very clearly in him the *principles* upon which English philosophy has always proceeded. The results of his work will probably have made intelligible what is to be understood by the psychological method of treating speculative problems, what is the precise nature of the assumptions underlying it, and what, on the whole, must be the characteristic feature of the opposed method. The psychological method, starting from the point of view of ordinary consciousness, in which the individual subject is confronted with two dissimilar series of facts, inner and outer experience, and in which each series, as it presents itself separately, is viewed from the same *quasi* external position, proceeds to treat these facts by the help of the familiar category or notion of the *thing* and its relations to other things. The world of external experience appears as a totality of existing things, reciprocally determining and being determined, each of which is what it is because the others are what they are. It matters not that, by the introduction of some subjective analysis, we reduce the supposed *things* to more or less permanent groups or series of sensations : the essential fact is, that they are thought as making up a mechanical whole. When the same conception is applied to inner experience, to the thinking subject, his states and relations to experience in general,

the only logical result is a system of completed determinism, or, as Fichte calls it, dogmatism. Even without raising the question as to the legitimacy or validity of the notion thus applied to the interpretation of things in external nature, Fichte points out that the same conception, the same method, cannot be applied to the interpretation of the life of the conscious subject. For, here, each fact is to be regarded, not only as a thing standing in relations to other things,—relations only conceivable when we secretly postulate the presence of some mind which relates the things to one another,—but as a fact *for* the conscious subject. They are not external to him, but form part of his very being and substance, and philosophy has specially to deal with their significance for him. The psychological method has simply thrown out of account or neglected the fundamental fact, that of self-consciousness. Mechanical or dogmatic explanations of mental phenomena may be adequate as statements of the conditions under which these phenomena come to be, but they are utterly inadequate as explanations of what these phenomena are for the conscious subject. Take as an example of the difference between the modes of treatment, the important distinction appearing in consciousness between Ego and non-Ego, self and not-self. The psychological theory, if it is wise and enlightened, begins by assuming provisionally the existence of objective conditions under which specific sensations arise, and points to the variable nature of these conditions, and the variable combinations of sensations which result—*e.g.*, the constant presence of motor or muscular sensations with different groups of passive sensations—as giving the key to the origin of the notion. But such an

explanation tacitly assumes the very point at issue. Why should either passive or active sensations, or any combinations of them, appear to the conscious subject himself as limitations? If we represent to ourselves the conscious subject as a thing acted upon and reacting, we may try by the help of this metaphor to render intelligible the fact that some states of his experience appear as objective and determined, while others are thought as subjective and relatively undetermined; but our explanation extends only to the metaphor and not to that which is symbolised. There is no resemblance between passive and active sensations, and the assumed actions and reactions from which they arise; and the only problem, how the consciousness of difference arises out of the sensations, is not answered by reference to actions and reactions which are not *in* the sensations at all, but, if in consciousness at all, are added by thought. On the other hand, the speculative method proposes, by an analysis of self-consciousness and of the conditions under which it is possible, to clear up the significance for the conscious subject himself of those important differences which characterise his experience. Nothing must here be assumed which transcends self-consciousness, but nothing must be accepted as solution which is not for self-consciousness. The distinction between Ego and non-Ego is one for the thinking subject; it is hopeless, therefore, to look for solution to hypotheses which lie outside of the thinking subject. The so-called scientific method in philosophy is emphatically the method of metaphysical assumptions, for throughout its procedure it has recourse to explanations which transcend experience.

Thus the philosophy of Fichte starts with the demand that the facts of experience shall be examined as facts of self-consciousness. They exist only for a thinking being, and their significance or interpretation for the thinking subject is the substance of philosophy. Philosophy is thus the re-thinking of experience,—the endeavour to construct by rigid and methodical analysis that which to ordinary consciousness presents itself as a completed and given whole. Speculation, therefore, in no way transcends the limits of experience; it does not extend the bounds of thinking; it intrudes in no way into the province of natural science, which is but an extension of ordinary consciousness. “No proposition of a philosophy which knows itself is, in that form, a proposition for real life. It is either a step in the system, from which further progress may be made; or if speculation has in it reached a final point, a proposition to which sensation and perception must be added, as rationally included therein, before it can be of service for life. Philosophy, even when completed, cannot yield the element of sense, which is the true inner principle of life (or actuality).”<sup>1</sup> Philosophy is thus the subjective side of that which objectively appears or presents itself as reality, in ordinary life. The experience of the finite subject, an experience in which, so far as cognition is concerned, the inner and outer worlds are distinct; in which, so far as action is concerned, sensuous impulse and reasoned purpose, personal desire and general or rational will, are combined; in which, so far as the whole sphere of his finite existence is concerned, the feeling of personal independence is curiously allied with

<sup>1</sup> “*Rückerinnerungen*,” § 9, ‘*Werke*,’ vol. v. p. 343.

those strivings after infinite being in which independence would cease;—this experience, in all its diversity, is the matter to be explained; and while philosophy may divide itself into various branches according to the different problems proposed, it is in a twofold sense a unity. For the experience to be interpreted is *one*, and the whole interpretation is but the exposition of the significance of experience for self-consciousness, which is also one.

If, now, we call any fact of experience which presents itself in consciousness, a cognition or matter of knowledge, and every systematic account of any series or class of such facts, a science (*Wissenschaft*), we shall be prepared to understand why it was that Fichte selected, as title for philosophy in general, the term, theory of science or of knowledge (*Wissenschaftslehre*), and what are the formal requirements of this comprehensive doctrine.<sup>1</sup> It is the business of *Wissenschaftslehre* to develop from its first principle the organic plan or complete framework of human knowledge. We may assume hypothetically that there is system in human cognition, and if so, we assume that all principles can be shown to rest upon some one comprehensive absolute principle—a principle incapable of proof, but giving the ground of proof to all

<sup>1</sup> The terms *theory of science* and *theory of knowledge* have of recent years acquired so special a significance among German writers on logic, that either would lead to misunderstanding if applied to Fichte's philosophical doctrine. *Theorie der Wissenschaft* has been taken to mean the systematic account of the methods actually followed in scientific research—*e.g.*, observation, experiment, analysis, &c.; while *Erkenntniss-theorie*, or theory of knowledge, when used by a logical writer, implies that he brings to bear upon the doctrines of formal logic the combined results of psychology and general philosophy. There is a deplorable want of consistency in the use of the terms.



other principles. Our assumption can receive justification only in and by the course of the development itself, —*i.e.*, we can show that there is system in human knowledge if we develop completely, from its first principle, all that is contained in human knowledge.

Fichte's earliest systematic work, the tract "On the Notion of Wissenschaftslehre," contains a number of formal determinations regarding the new science; but the true meaning of what is there laid down becomes apparent only when the nature of the doctrine itself has been seen. It is desirable therefore to omit all reference to this tract, at least until the system has been explained.

## CHAPTER VI.

## “WISSENSCHAFTSLEHRE” IN ITS EARLIER FORM.

THE general aim or spirit of the Wissenschaftslehre having been determined, it becomes necessary to consider more particularly the nature of the problems presenting themselves for solution, and the method by which they are to be treated. As regards both points, the most valuable writings are the two “Introductions to Wissenschaftslehre,” and the “Sonnenklarer Bericht.”<sup>1</sup>

## 1.—DOGMATISM AND IDEALISM.

The slightest reflection discloses to us the remarkable distinction in consciousness between two orders of representations<sup>2</sup> or phenomena, which we call, with some vagueness, inner and outer experience. With more pre-

<sup>1</sup> ‘Werke,’ vol. i. pp. 419-518; vol. ii. pp. 323-420.

<sup>2</sup> The term *Vorstellung* is used by Fichte, as indeed by all German writers, in various senses; and the ambiguity attaching to it is undoubtedly one of the main causes of the misunderstanding of his doctrine, as of the Kantian system. Here it is employed simply to denote some form of consciousness—something of which the subject is aware. Nothing is thereby decided as to the *mode of existence* of the representation. It is not meanwhile to be regarded as a subjective state—*i.e.*, as a modification of the individual, particular Ego.

cision, we should say that, while some phenomena of consciousness present themselves as evidently the products of free mental activity, others appear in an order independent of us, and are characterised for us by the accompanying "feeling" of necessity which attaches to them. Now, the problem of philosophy—*i.e.*, of Wissenschaftslehre—is to explain experience, to render it intelligible; and all explanation consists in rendering a reason for the phenomena to be explained. The ground of experience, in the highest sense, is not to be sought beyond experience itself, but our reflection upon experience does undoubtedly proceed beyond it, since it regards the whole as matter to be accounted for. This procedure beyond experience is, in fact, the process familiarly known as abstraction. Philosophical theory, having presented to it the complex fact of the coexistence of inner and outer experience, abstracts from the condition of coexistence, and selects for isolated consideration, on the one hand, the Ego or conscious subject, on the other hand, the non-Ego or object simply. Whether such abstraction is a legitimate process may remain meanwhile undetermined,—the analysis of the problem itself will throw light upon the nature of the thoughts involved in it,—but by its means we reach the fundamental opposition of philosophical systems. Ego and non-Ego, subject and object, thought and being, are separate grounds, to which the whole of experience may be referred for explanation. Do we explain experience as the product of the non-Ego, we have the system which may be called Dogmatism; do we explain the whole as springing from the Ego, we have Idealism. Of the one, the typical example is the system of Spinoza, in which the order and connection of thoughts

are explained by reference to that which does not contain in itself the element of self-consciousness,—where, therefore, the Ego appears as a mechanically determined unit in the sum total of things. Of the other, a representative may probably be found in Leibnitz, though much of the later Kantian speculation is only intelligible as a kind of half-understood idealism.<sup>1</sup>

Which of these counter-principles has right on its side? Does either satisfy the requirements of philosophical explanation? It is evident, on the one hand, that the dogmatic method, if true to itself, must, in the end, have resort to an absolutely unknown and unknowable thing as the non-Ego. The thing-in-itself is, in fact, the solution offered by dogmatism; and such solution is defective in two ways. In the first place, while for a supposed external observer the existence of a non-Ego might furnish explanation of what presents itself in the consciousness of the subject—that is to say, of the limitation of the subject—no such explanation is possible for the subject himself. That he should *be* limited may possibly result from the existence of a non-Ego; that he should *know himself* as limited cannot be explained from the existence of the non-Ego simply. In the second place, the assumed non-Ego is for the thinking subject non-existent: no possible predicate can, by the subject, be attached to it which does not imply reference to the subject, and therefore relative, dependent existence.

<sup>1</sup> Berkeley, as Fichte rightly notes, is a *dogmatist*; but some phases of his speculation, and much of the philosophy which has rested itself on Berkeley, may be regarded as idealist. Fichte himself does not, in this reference, adduce Leibnitz as the type of idealism,—and there are certainly elements in Leibnitz which might lead one to class him otherwise.

The non-Ego, as such, as thing-in-itself, is not in consciousness, and is, for the Ego, nothing.

Dogmatism thus furnishes no explanation. The opposed principle, that of idealism pure and simple, has at least one superiority: it selects, as ground of explanation, what is unquestionably in consciousness. The Ego, or subject, is known to be. But when the Ego, or subject, is taken *per se*, and the attempt is made to deduce from it the multiplicity of experience, we find a *hiatus* which is absolutely impassable, unless our method is at once guarded and comprehensive. An imperfect or half-understood idealism regards the Ego as merely subject, and is thus driven to the conception of self-consciousness as somehow one of the facts discoverable in intelligence. In this case, while it may be possible to explain that the Ego should know itself as limited, it is quite impossible to explain how it should know itself as limited by the non-Ego. As Fichte rightly puts it, "In vain shall we look for a link of connection between subject and object, if they are not first and simply apprehended as a unity.

. . The Ego is not to be regarded as subject merely, but as at once subject and object." <sup>1</sup>

If we translate Fichte's reasoning regarding idealism into other terms, it might be expressed thus. Idealist speculation has sought the ground of explanation in consciousness,—in that which is immediately and directly known to us. But in so doing, it has followed the same method which, when dealing with the thing-in-itself, gave rise to dogmatism. It has regarded consciousness as merely so much to be known,—as a series of states, *Vorstellungen*, from which nothing can possibly be ex-

<sup>1</sup> "Versuch einer neuen Darstellung," 'Werke,' vol. i. pp. 528, 529.



tracted. It has not considered how consciousness comes to be, what conditions are necessarily implied in its existence, what are the laws under which it acts. Thus idealism drifts easily into a kind of psychological doctrine (as in Schmid, and later in Fries), or results in a sceptical phenomenalism (as in Maimon and in Hume).<sup>1</sup> Only one idealist system has really gone to the heart of the problem, and fairly considered how it is that, in consciousness, there appears the opposition between Ego and non-Ego ; for only one philosophy has seized the principle that consciousness or intelligence as a whole is conditioned by self-consciousness, and that the laws under which self-consciousness are realised are at once the form and matter of intelligence. This is the critical or transcendental idealism of Kant,—a system imperfect in details, easily misunderstood, and requiring to be remodelled or restated before it can be made to yield adequate solution of the speculative problem.

Thus for Fichte there are historically but two reasoned systems of philosophy—that of Spinoza and that of Kant. The one is dogmatic,—that is, it neglects to give due weight to the principle of self-consciousness, and hence endeavours to explain existence by a notion which is limited, and applicable only within the experience of a self-conscious subject. The other is critical,—that is, it recognises the great truth that all consciousness is determined by self-consciousness, and so acknowledges the due limits of thought. If we were to express in a single

<sup>1</sup> It is not a little remarkable how slight appears to have been Fichte's acquaintance with Hume's writings. Scepticism, as a whole, indeed, plays but a small part in his system of thinking, and is generally dismissed with a species of contempt. Cf. '*Werke*,' vol. i. p. 120 n.

word the characteristic feature of Fichte's system, we should describe it as "Spinoza in terms of Kant." That which was wanting in the critical philosophy, systematic development, is predominant in Spinoza; and, as will be seen, the theoretical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is nothing but an inverted or idealistic Spinozism. It has often been said that the influence of Spinoza over the course of Fichte's speculation became more significant in the second period of his literary activity; but even were this the case, one must not forget that in the earliest expositions of *Wissenschaftslehre*, comparison with Spinoza, and recognition of similarity with his thoughts, appear throughout. To understand the substance of Fichte's speculation, some note must be taken of these historical antecedents.

## 2.—HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS: SPINOZA AND KANT.

To any one acquainted with Spinoza's system, Fichte's description of it as essentially "dogmatic" must at first appear erroneous; for by a dogmatic system Fichte understands one which deduces the order of conscious experience from a supposed order of things,—and it needs but slight knowledge of Spinoza to be aware that for him any implied contrast or relation between the order of ideas and the order of things has no place. It is necessary, however, to pass beyond the mere verbal definition of dogmatism on the one hand, and the mere statement of Spinoza's opinion on the other, if we are to discuss fairly the relation between them. That which characterises *dogmatism* as a philosophical method is not simply the distinction between ideas and things, but the nature of the notion or category by means of which

either ideas or things are made comprehensible. In all cases of explanation, we find, as the residuum of analysis, some fundamental relation or thought by means of which the facts involved have become for us intelligible. Thus the notion or relation of cause is involved in all explanations of physical change, and itself requires to be critically analysed in order that we may see what assumptions or underlying notions are implied in it. Now the notion which dogmatism applies to explanation of experience is briefly that of mutual determination,—what Kant called the category of Reciprocity. Each thing, or part of real experience, has its definite character by and through its relations to all other things. It is determined to be what it is, by virtue of the determinations of other things. A notion or category of this kind is evidently highly complex; and, indeed, as one might conjecture, it may be applied with much variety of signification. It may remain a purely mechanical category, implying only external relations of the things which compose a collective or aggregate whole; or it may be elevated so as to become the idea of a systematic whole, in which the relations of the parts are not mechanical.<sup>1</sup> The first significance, however, is that which characterises the use of the notion in the dogmatic method. For here things and ideas are regarded as alike in one respect, as being alike finite objects of possible cognition. Each external thing, each idea, is finite in its kind—*i.e.*, is capable of being limited, determined by another. Through this limitation by others, each has its definite being. It matters not, then, whether we regard things and ideas as composing

<sup>1</sup> The double significance of this category is very apparent in the Kantian system.

two orders, of which one is cause, the other effect, or assert that things and ideas are both the same, looked at from different points of view; in either case we subject the facts to the same mode of explanation, regard each as a unit, marked off from others, and with only external relations to them, and explain the special characteristics of each as depending on the coexistence of all the others.

Now this notion of reciprocity or mutual determination is fundamental in Spinoza, and is that by which his system has gained its greatest influence over modern thought. It is true that it is not the only notion used by Spinoza,—in fact, the difficulties, even incomprehensibilities, of his metaphysics arise mainly from the conjunction of the notion of mutual determination with that of substance,—but it is a thought which is involved in scientific procedure as such, and through it Spinoza has been brought into the closest relations with modern scientific work. The phrases, more or less commonplace, by which the systematic unity of things is expressed,—such as, the order and uniformity of nature, the prevalence of law,—are merely expressions of what is contained in this notion of reciprocity. It is evident, further, that if we apply this notion to the explanation of experience, we must regard self-consciousness, the essence of the thinking subject, as merely one phenomenon, or state, or *thing*, determined by relations to other phenomena, and assume that these relations are of an external kind. Thus, for Spinoza, the peculiarity of self-consciousness vanishes; and even if we interpret liberally the obscure propositions ('Ethics,' ii. *Props.* 21 *et seq.*) in which the *Idea Mentis* is treated, it is evident that self-conscious-

ness, as understood by him, is referred to that which lies outside of it and therefore mechanically determines it.

Fichte's criticism of this dogmatic method is in form and spirit identical with the later and more famous expression of Hegel. He has to point out that Spinoza omits altogether *criticism* of the notion of mutual determination—that is to say, omits to examine the nature and validity of the notion for our thinking. Had such criticism been undertaken, it would have become apparent that a category like reciprocity is entirely inadequate to express the relation of self-consciousness and the experience to which it is related; that substance and mode, Spinoza's supreme forms, are limited in their nature; and that there is no philosophic ground for procedure beyond self-consciousness. While signalling these faults, Fichte nevertheless recognises the high ideal of speculation which is disclosed in Spinoza's 'Ethics,' and draws largely on the Spinozistic method. Many of his fundamental principles, both in the earlier and the later periods of his thinking, are in form and matter identical with those of the 'Ethics.' There is no sufficient ground for asserting, as many writers have done, that the influence of Spinoza over Fichte increased, and that in the final period of the latter's philosophising his exposition is merely a mystical Spinozism. No closer connection is possible than that between the theoretical portion of the 'Wissenschaftslehre' and the principles of Spinoza. The later works accentuate somewhat the religious aspect of the theory of knowledge, but imply no other theory; and however close in forms of expression the religious doctrines of the two thinkers may be, the



radical opposition in their point of view is not to be forgotten.

This radical opposition in point of view was the natural and inevitable consequence of the critical philosophy. To understand the specific problems presented to Fichte, it is necessary to note with some care what the Kantian system had completed, and what it had left undone.

To Kant the problem of philosophy in general had presented itself under special aspects determined by historical circumstances,—in the main, however, under the aspect of a question as to the possibility of knowledge. This question he for the first time proposed to treat in its wider issues, as independent of psychology and of metaphysical assumptions. Beyond all doubt it was not given to Kant,—it is given to no thinker,—to free himself entirely from the notions and phraseology current at the time; and so it has come about that the ‘*Critique of Pure Reason*,’ the work in which the dogmatic method of English philosophy and of Leibnitz was first subjected to examination, shows in many of its main doctrines unmistakable traces of the method against which it was directed. Thus, while Kant is making clear, on the one hand, that knowledge, for the self-conscious subject, cannot be explained by reference to a world of things thought as out of connection with self-consciousness, he still allows himself ambiguities of speech which might be interpreted to mean that the special content of knowledge, the matter, is explicable by reference to such things; and while he makes clear, on the other hand, that the conception of a mere stream of conscious states, as the phenomena of an individual subject, is in itself

contradictory and absurd, he yet draws distinctions which might be taken to imply that the difference of subjective and objective in knowledge is one of kind, and not a subordinate form to be explained under the more comprehensive synthesis with which he started.

If, then, it be considered what was for Kant the fundamental principle of philosophical method, and how far the actual results of his system correspond with the requirements of the method, a summary view of the problems left for solution to the post-Kantian writers may readily be obtained. Now the fundamental principle, disguised under many strange fashions of speech in the 'Critique of Pure Reason,' is that already described as the principle of self-consciousness. All knowledge, all experience, *is* only for a self-conscious subject. Such a subject is not to be regarded as an individual, for the notion of individuality implies relations of a complex and quite distinct kind. It is the common element in all consciousness, that by which consciousness is what it is. If, therefore, the explanation of experience be proposed as the problem of philosophy, the method of procedure may be either an investigation of the idea of self-consciousness, the determination of the conditions under which it is possible, and the evolution in strict sequence of the elements which are embraced in it; or by an analysis of knowledge, of experience, as it presents itself in ordinary, empirical consciousness, and the determination of the features in it due to the presence of this central unity. The second method was that adopted by Kant, and the result has been somewhat unfortunate. For, in consequence of the method adopted, the several elements composing knowledge were dis-

cussed in isolation from one another and from their central unity, and were thus, almost of necessity, viewed not as elements in a synthesis, which have no existence save in and through their combination, but as independent parts of an integral or collective whole. Thus, in the 'Critique of Pure Reason,' the problem is stated in an ambiguous and confusing way; and in the 'Æsthetik,' more particularly, the central point of view is lost sight of in a quite subordinate issue. Knowledge, Kant sees clearly enough, is possible only as a synthetic combination in the unity of self-consciousness. The conditions or forms of such combination determine experience, or give general laws to it, but such determination is merely formal. Nothing can be presented in self-consciousness which contradicts or is out of harmony with these conditions, but the specific determination of this matter of knowledge is not to be deduced from the conditions themselves. Upon this view of the purely formal or logical function of the unity of thought rest the Kantian distinctions of the *a priori* and *a posteriori* elements in cognition, of form and matter, of sense and understanding, of empirical and transcendent reality, of phenomena and noumena. So far, then, as theory of knowledge goes, Kant, while bringing into the foreground the very first principle of cognition, fails to connect therewith the subordinate forms. Space and Time are shown, on special grounds, not to be explicable by reference to external things or to states of subjective experience, but they are placed in no intimate relation to the unity of self-consciousness. The conscious subject is *receptive*, and, if receptive, only under the pure forms of space and time. But how or why a self-conscious subject should appear to itself receptive; how or

why, if receptive, it should be so in the forms of space and time,—are questions entirely unresolved. So when Kant undertakes the discussion of the key-stone to his position, the deduction of the categories or exposition of the forms of combination which make up the nature of the thinking subject, his procedure is equally external and haphazard. It is certainly shown that *categories* are implied in self-consciousness, but how or why they should be so implied—how or why there should be so many of them and no more—how they are connected with one another and form a system in human knowledge,—these questions, likewise, are left unsolved. Further, when the categories, having been deduced as the forms of the activity of the synthetic Ego, are brought into relation with the forms of receptivity, the results, though rich in consequences, leave much to be desired. The fusion into the unity of knowledge is a merely mechanical one. Categories as modes of understanding, schemata as modes of productive imagination, data of sense as modes of affection, are linked together, and appear to have a nature and existence independently of one another, and of the synthesis in which they are combined. The final result—the world of sense-experience determined throughout by intelligence, but in itself an empirically endless series of finite, limited objects—is not one which can satisfy the demand for unity of cognition. The constant striving to transcend the limits of this world of experience, to reach the final synthesis in which its relation to self-consciousness shall be deduced, is what Kant calls Reason. So far as cognition is concerned, the one result of reason is the empty notion of the thing in itself,—a notion which,

unfortunately, was by Kant so expressed, and by the Kantians so understood, as to imply much of the old dogmatic theory which it had been the business of the 'Critique' to explode. Kant, however, is not to be credited with all that has been drawn from his speculations by writers who had never grasped his fundamental principle. For him, the thing in itself, the expression of the infinite striving of self-consciousness, is discoverable only in self-consciousness, as its absolute law. The statement of this absolute law is certainly approached by Kant from the empirical point of view or by an analytic method, and the position assigned by him to the categorical imperative seems at first sight to sunder Reason entirely from the world of experience. Nothing, indeed, can make the Kantian moral theory perfectly coherent; but, with especial reference to Fichte and the later German philosophy, it must be stated with perhaps unnecessary definiteness, that only in the categorical imperative does the notion of the thing-in-itself hold any position as a reality in the Kantian metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> The final synthesis, so far as it was attempted by Kant, appears only in the 'Critique of Judgment,' in which, by means of the notion of End, a reconciliation is sought between

<sup>1</sup> It is much to be regretted that, almost without exception, the best English expositions of Kant restrict themselves to an account of the 'Critique of Pure Reason.' Nothing but error and confusion can result from this arbitrary limitation. It is much as though one were to treat only the theoretical portion of 'Wissenschaftslehre,' and leave untouched the fundamental problems of the practical side. That the Kantian theory appeared in three separate books, is no reason why we should treat it as three separate theories. The 'Critique of Practical Reason,' moreover, though simple enough in its details, stands more in need of elucidation and commentary, so far as its principle is concerned, than the 'Critique of Pure Reason.'



the intelligible or moral world, the realm of things-in-themselves, and the world of experience, of phenomena. The ethical idealism with which the Kantian theory closes, comes nearer to the Fichtian position than can be made apparent without more lengthy analysis of Kant than is here possible; but even in it we find the same tendency to separation which is the harassing feature of all the Kantian work. Fichte, it must be held, was justified in his constant complaint that in Kant there were really three theories which are never amalgamated. "Kant," he remarks in an instructive passage in the *'Nachgelassene Werke,'* "had three absolutes. . . . In the *'Critique of Pure Reason,'* sense-experience was for him the absolute ( $=x$ ); and in regard to the ideas, the higher, intelligible world, he expressed himself in a most depreciatory fashion. From his earlier works, and from hints in the *'Critique'* itself, it may certainly be inferred that he would not have halted at that position; but I will engage to show that these hints are mere inconsequences of reasoning, for if his principles were consistently followed out, the supersensible world must vanish entirely, and as the only noumenon there would remain that which is to be realised in experience. . . . The loftier moral nature of the man corrected his philosophical error, and so appeared the *'Critique of Practical Reason.'* In it was manifested the categorical notion of the Ego as something in itself, which could never have appeared in the *'Critique of Pure Reason;'* we have thus a second absolute, a moral world ( $=z$ ). But all the phenomena of human nature were not thereby explained. The relations of the beautiful, of the sublime, and of end in nature, which palpably were neither theoretical nor

moral notions, yet remained. Moreover, what is of much greater importance, the empirical world was now absorbed in the moral world, as a world in itself,—a just retribution, as it were, for the first victory of the empirical. There appeared, then, the ‘Critique of Judgment,’ in the introduction to which—the most remarkable portion of that remarkable work—it was acknowledged that the supersensible and the sensible worlds must have some common though undiscoverable root, which root is the third absolute ( $=y$ ). I say a *third*, separate from the two preceding and independent, although giving unity to them; and in this I do Kant no wrong. For if this  $y$  is undiscoverable, it may *contain* the other two; but we cannot comprehend how it does so, or deduce them from it. If, on the other hand, it is to be comprehended, it must be comprehended as absolute; and there remain, as before, three absolutes.”<sup>1</sup>

The Kantian philosophy, while definitely formulating the first principle of speculation, thus left unsolved a whole series of problems, all of them arising in connection with one line of thought, and furnishing the material for later efforts at systematic development of the principle from which it started. With more or less clearness the thinkers who immediately followed Kant undertook the solution of these problems, and their work to a large extent determined the character of the Fichtean system, and was incorporated into it. Thus Reinhold’s constant demand for unity of principle is recognised by Fichte as an attempt in the right direction, though the principle selected by him, that of representation

<sup>1</sup> ‘Nachgelassene Werke,’ vol. ii. pp. 102-104. See also ‘Leben und Briefwechsel,’ vol. ii. p. 177.

(*Vorstellung*) as the fundamental fact of consciousness, was incapable of yielding any result more satisfactory than had been presented in the Kantian philosophy. Reinhold evidently felt the difficulty of bringing subject and object into any connection whatsoever, if they were assumed as originally distinct. He therefore proposed to select as starting-point the existence of the conscious state or representation, in which subject and object are contained as factors, and endeavoured by analysis of this fact to deduce the several doctrines which in a less coherent form had been brought forward by Kant. But in the first place, as Fichte points out in the 'Review of *Ænesidemus*,'<sup>1</sup> the primary datum of philosophical construction cannot be a fact or representation, but must be the simple and original activity by which the fact the representation comes to be; and in the second place, as had been made quite apparent by the sceptical dialecticism of '*Ænesidemus*' (Schulze), the idea of *Vorstellung* involved that doctrine which above all others was a stumbling-block to the Kantians,—the doctrine that the matter or definite content of *Vorstellung* was determined *ab extra*, by things-in-themselves. So, too, Beck's acute restatement of the Kantian theory had brought into the clearest light the gross misconceptions which might readily arise from Kant's mode of stating his doctrines. To many of the Kantians, indeed, the theory of the *a priori* character of the forms of perception and thought had been nothing but a revival, in the crudest sense, of the old doctrine of innate ideas. To them Kant's idea of self-consciousness, as conditioning knowledge, had meant that the individual subject was some-

<sup>1</sup> 'Werke,' vol. i. p. 9. Cf. vol. i. p. 468.

how acted upon by things, and that in consequence of the *a priori* or innate mechanism of consciousness, the effects of such action took of necessity the forms of space and time and the categories. Beck's admirable discussion of the Kantian distinctions between analytic and synthetic judgments, synthetic *a priori* and synthetic *a posteriori* truths, intuition and thought, phenomena and things-in-themselves, sufficiently showed that these were but excrescences on the Kantian doctrine, merely temporary expedients for bringing the real problems into light; while the definiteness with which he expressed the cardinal doctrine of Kant's theory, the original synthetic unity of self-consciousness, threw light on all the subordinate points.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Beck furnished no sufficient grounds for the original position of the object, which according to him is the very essence of the activity of self-consciousness. His theory failed to explain how and why it is that for the subject there is necessarily the object, the non-Ego. It left still in isolation the separate elements which had been thrown together by Kant. Finally, the acute criticisms of Maimon, for whose talent Fichte expresses unbounded admiration, had shown to demonstration how utterly inconsistent with the genuine Kantian doctrine was the commonly received view of the thing-in-itself. He too, however, misconceived Kant's idea of self-consciousness, found himself perplexed by the problem of the relation between the categories or forms of thought

<sup>1</sup> Beck's 'Einzig-möglicher Standpunct' (Riga, 1796), though not written with much skill, is yet one of the best and most instructive commentaries on the 'Kritik,' and should be neglected by no student of Kant.

and the given matter of sense, proceeded to accept experience as consisting of a given series of phenomenal states, with the attributes of space and time, rejected therefore all *a priori* truths except the mathematical or quantitative, and thus left untouched the deeper problems raised by the 'Kritik.'

The way had thus been prepared for Fichte's endeavour to take up in a comprehensive fashion the speculative question as it had been formulated by Kant, and to work into an organic whole what had been left by Kant in a fragmentary form. The artificial and sometimes forced fashion in which the 'Wissenschaftslehre' at first proceeded must not disguise from us the genuine nature of the task Fichte had set before him, or the principle which underlies it. Firm adherence to the idea of the transcendental method; determination to accept nothing, whether as fact, law, or notion, which is not deducible from self-consciousness and its necessary conditions,—such is the spirit of the Fichtean philosophy, and from it follows the demand for systematic unity of conception, for a single principle out of which the multiplicity of experience may be deduced, and therefore for a single, all-embracing philosophical science. It is this very consistency which renders the detailed study of the Fichtean system a matter of so much difficulty, for if the fundamental idea be not grasped,—and as Fichte truly says, his philosophy is either to be mastered at a stroke or not at all,—little or none of the help which even Kant affords is extended to the student. The familiar psychological distinctions which furnish natural divisions in the Kantian theory of knowledge, are entirely wanting in the 'Wissenschaftslehre.' Sense, understood



reason, are not assumed as rubrics under which special kinds of knowledge may be arranged, but are regarded as specific modes in the development or realisation of self-consciousness, and appear in their determined position in the series of necessary acts by which self-consciousness is realised. The notions by which popular or unphilosophical thinking manages to explain to itself the nature of things—*e.g.*, the notion of cause by which we think the relation of objects to the variable contents of our representations—are not accepted or permitted to pass until they have been deduced, or shown to arise in the development of the necessary conditions of self-consciousness. The Kantian categories, the anomalous position of which had given occasion to grave misunderstanding of the very meaning of the system, are not in any way assumed as pre-existing forms into which matter falls; but object as formed by the category, and category as form of the object, are deduced together.

If Wissenschaftslehre is to accomplish its object—the systematic evolution of all that enters into consciousness—its starting-point must be found in that which renders any consciousness or knowledge possible. Such starting-point, by its very nature, cannot be a demonstrable fact, nor can it be comprehended in strict logical fashion,—that is, brought under a notion. All certainty rests ultimately on immediate evidence or intuition. The first condition, therefore, of consciousness, must be realised by us in the form of intuition. But the said first condition of consciousness is manifestly the consciousness of self. “Along with whatever any intelligence writes,” says Ferrier, whose statement may here be accepted. “In place of any more elaborate treatment, “it must,

as the ground or condition of its knowledge, have some cognisance of itself." To the speculative inquirer, endeavouring to reconstruct that which is immediately given in experience, the first and common ground for all experience is the result of that act whereby the Ego or self becomes an Ego or self. Of the necessary implications of this fundamental activity and its product, nothing requires at first to be said; philosophy is simply the attempt to give a systematic and complete account of them. But no philosophy can transcend the fact; and any problem referring to that which is absolutely dis-severed from the result of the fact, must be dismissed as in terms contradictory and absurd. To ask, for example, whether the activity by which the Ego becomes an Ego does not presuppose the prior existence, in reality,—in an objective fashion,—of the Ego, is merely to make the<sup>nt</sup>, "wonderful assumption that the Ego is something dif-ferent from its own consciousness of itself, and that<sup>iat</sup> something, heaven knows what, lying beyond this con-<sup>n</sup>-sciousness, is the foundation of it,"<sup>1</sup> and to introduce is notions of a complex and hypothetical character, such as <sup>o-</sup>existence and time, into the explanation of that with <sup>r</sup>reference to which only have such notions significance. <sup>y</sup> Doubtless, to the popular consciousness, thought presents itself as merely one, and probably one of the least important, of the facts of experience,—as arising from and dependent on the nature of things. But philosophy and popular thinking move on different platforms, and most of the gravest errors in speculation arise from the transference of considerations which are in due place in one of them into the other, where they are absolute absurdi-

<sup>1</sup> 'Werke,' vol. i. p. 460.

ties. The philosophical construction of the world of experience is not to be confused with the world of experience itself, nor is it to be taken as a natural—*i.e.*, psychological—history of the development of the individual mind.<sup>1</sup> If in the development of the necessary conditions of self-consciousness, it is shown how the notion of a non-Ego arises,—if feeling and representation are deduced,—it is not to be supposed that by such process of deduction these, as facts of experience, are *produced*. Production and genetic construction of the contents of consciousness are totally distinct. Life, as Fichte puts it, is non-philosophising, and philosophy is non-living.

The intuition of the activity, whose product is the reflex act of consciousness—an activity the exact nature of which will presently be considered—Fichte calls *intellectual intuition*. The name is unfortunate, both as regards his predecessor Kant, and as regards his successor Schelling, for, in their systems, the same term is employed to denote two quite diverse facts. In the critical philosophy, intellectual intuition was used to indicate the supposed mode of consciousness by which a knowledge of things-in-themselves might be obtained, and was therefore regarded as contradictory of the very principles of the system. Fichte has little difficulty in showing that, so far as this meaning of the term is concerned, there is no difference of opinion between Kant and himself; but he, at the same time, points out that the whole critical analysis rested upon the fact of the unity of consciousness (or, as Kant called it, the unity of apperception), and that for this unity no name was so appropriate as that of intellectual intuition. On the

<sup>1</sup> 'Werke,' vol. i. pp. 397-399. Cf. vol. v. pp. 333 *et seq.*

other hand, in Schelling's system, intellectual intuition was employed to denote the consciousness of the absolute, of the identity between subject and object; and, in so far, there is a certain resemblance between his use of the term and that of Fichte. There was, however, a fundamental difference between the two thinkers in regard to this identity of subject and object; and in his later writings, Fichte, to emphasise his opposition to Schelling, generally employed the expression, *free activity*, to denote the fundamental act and product of the Ego.

In calling the consciousness of the fundamental activity of the Ego intuition, Fichte had a twofold object. He desired to bring into prominence the fact that he is not starting with any abstract notion, but with the activity of the Ego—an activity not to be designated thought, or will, or by any other complex, and therefore misleading, term; and further, to indicate from the outset what was the peculiar nature of the general method of *Wissenschaftslehre*. For an intuition is never a datum which is simply received in experience. It is invariably the product of a constructive act. The intuition of a triangle, for example, is the consciousness of a definite and necessarily determined procedure of construction within the limitations of space; and in this process of construction we see intuitively the connection of the elements,—we see how each subsequent portion of the construction is determined by what has preceded; and as the process is general, determined only by the conditions of space, we are at the same time aware of the generality of the result. Intuitive knowledge, therefore, is genetic, and *Wissenschaftslehre*, the systematic consciousness of what is contained in the

fundamental intellectual intuition, must likewise be genetic in method. Wissenschaftslehre will show "that the fundamental proposition, posited and immediately known as existent in consciousness, is impossible unless under a further condition, and that this further condition is likewise impossible unless a third be added,—until the conditions of the first are completely developed, and the possibility of the same completely comprehended."<sup>1</sup> It will "construct the whole common consciousness of all rational beings in its fundamental characteristics, with pure *a priori* evidence, just as geometry constructs, with pure *a priori* evidence, the general modes of limitation of space by all rational beings. It starts from the simplest and most characteristic quality of self-consciousness, the intuition of the Ego,<sup>2</sup> and, under the assumption that the completely qualified self-consciousness is the final result of all the other qualifications of consciousness, proceeds until this is thoroughly deduced. To each link in the chain of these qualifications a new one is added, and it is clear, in the direct intuition of them, that the same addition must take place in the consciousness of every rational being. Call the Ego A. Then, in the intuition of the construction of A, it is seen that B is inseparably connected with it. In the intuition of the construction of B, it is equally clear that C is an inseparable link, and so on, till we reach the final member of A,—completed self-consciousness,—which manifests itself as complete and perfect."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Werke,' vol. i. p. 446.

<sup>2</sup> Fichte's expression, *Anschauung der Ich-heit*, is more exact, but, I think, untranslatable into English.

<sup>3</sup> 'Werke,' vol. ii. pp. 379, 380.



No commentary upon these passages seems necessary, save perhaps on the expression, "completed self-consciousness," of which, indeed, the system itself is the best explanation. On both sides, this notion of completed self-consciousness requires to be guarded or defined—with regard to its essence as *self*-consciousness, and with regard to its *completion*. To popular thinking, self-consciousness is identical with individuality,—with the knowledge of self as a personal, active being, related to others, and to a universe of things. But it is at once evident that knowledge of individuality in this sense is a complex fact, and a fact of which the ground or possibility must be sought in the original act whereby the subject is conscious at all. "The Ego of real consciousness is always particular, and isolated: it is a person among other persons, each of whom describes himself as an Ego; and Wissenschaftslehre must develop up to the point at which such consciousness is explained. Totally distinct from this is the Ego from which Wissenschaftslehre starts; for this is nothing but the identity of the conscious subject with that of which it is conscious. Abstraction from all else that is contained in personality is necessary in order to attain this point of view."<sup>1</sup>

Self-consciousness, in fact, is the common element in all knowledge and action, and therefore cannot in itself contain that which is special and particular to the individual. It is the ground of individuality; for without it there could not possibly be the developed, concrete consciousness of personality; but as ground, it is distinct from that which is conditioned by it. We may call it, if we choose, the pure Ego, or form of the Ego,—Fichte,

<sup>1</sup> 'Werke,' vol. ii. p. 382. Cf. 'Briefwechsel,' p. 166.

as above noted, occasionally employs the untranslatable term *Ich-heit*,—but under whatever fashion of speech, we have to recognise in it the indispensable condition of all consciousness. Intellectual intuition lies at the basis of all more developed modes of mental action.

What, then, is to be understood by *completed* self-consciousness? Evidently, the realisation in consciousness of all that can be shown to be necessarily implied or involved in intellectual intuition as such. For it may very well happen that the peculiar activity of the Ego, in becoming conscious of itself, implies a number of intermediate stages,—such, for instance, as the definite separation of subject and object, self and not-self; the definite *representation* of each of these under special forms; the recognition of a plurality of individual active beings, with rights and duties; and all of these may speculatively be exhibited as following from, and dependent on, self-consciousness itself. In that case, completed self-consciousness would mean, not simply the abstract moment of self-identity, but the consciousness to which the individual may arrive, that he occupies a place in an ideal system of conscious beings, in an ideal order; that his finite existence is to be regarded as the continuous effort to realise what is implied in that position; and thus, that his individuality is lost or absorbed in the universal, rational order. All knowledge and the varied forms of law, of state mechanism, of moral duties, of religious beliefs, would thus appear to consciousness as necessary elements of the scheme or plan of the ideal world; and the consciousness of this ideal system, which it is the business of speculative philosophy to describe, would be completed self-consciousness. This is, in substance, the

distinction which Fichte indicates between the Ego as intellectual intuition, and the Ego as idea. "The idea of the Ego has only this in common with the Ego as intuition, that in both the Ego is thought as not individual,—in the latter, because the form of the Ego is not yet defined to the point of individuality; in the former, conversely, because the individual is lost in thought and action according to universal laws. The two are opposed in this, that in the Ego as intuition only the form of the Ego is to be found, and no reference can be made to any special matter,—which indeed becomes conceivable only when the thought of a world arises in the Ego—while, on the other hand, in the Ego as idea, the whole matter of the Ego is thought. From the first, speculative cognition proceeds, and to the latter it tends: only in the practical sphere can the idea be posited as the ultimate goal of the efforts of reason. The first is original intuition, and becomes for us, when treated by thought, a notion (*Begriff*): the latter is idea only; it cannot be thought in a determinate fashion; it can never exist *realiter*, but we must continuously approximate to it."<sup>1</sup> It need not surprise us that Fichte, at this period of his philosophical reflection, should frequently use the term God as equivalent to the pure Ego, regarded as idea. Such a doctrine can appear startling only if we identify self-consciousness with individuality, and if we fail to see that were God not involved in self-consciousness, His existence must be for ever contingent or unnecessary for thought. We have here one of the points on which it is instructive to

<sup>1</sup> 'Werke,' vol. i. p. 516. The distinction here taken between *Begriff* and *Idee* is, on the whole, Kantian. The passage implies much that can only be made intelligible through the system itself.

note the difference between Fichte's position and that of Spinoza. For Spinoza, as for philosophy in general, the supreme problem is to connect the particular with the system of which it is a part,—a problem which we may call the reduction of the many to one, or by what phrase we please. Now the one and the many are definitely described by Spinoza, but so separated as to render transition or union wellnigh impossible. As in the Eleatic system, so in that of Spinoza, the two elements fall asunder. It is true that Spinoza seems to have thought the problem solved by pointing to the impossibility of thinking the particular or finite, save as in relation to the infinite; but his treatment of this necessity of thinking is the weak point in his system. Modes of thought become for him so many finite objects, mutually determining and determined; and any relation to substance is thus, for them, impossible. To an intellect regarding finite modes from without, it might well be impossible to think of them, except as limitations of the infinite substance; but no such thought is possible for the finite modes themselves. The two notions with which Spinoza works—substance and mutual determination—are irreconcilable; and their subjective counterparts, understanding and imagination, are, in a similar fashion, left standing side by side.<sup>1</sup> It is on account of this failure to unite the two elements of his system that Fichte classes Spinoza as a dogmatist, and points out that

<sup>1</sup> Expositions of Spinoza are frequently imperfect from laying undue stress on one of these elements. Mr Pollock's recent very able statement entirely rejects or casts in the shade the first of them. Spinoza is treated throughout as working with the important scientific notion of mutual determination.

his own doctrine, on the speculative side, is Spinozism, but, as containing the higher synthesis, an inverted or spiritualised Spinozism. The same criticism is contained in Hegel's pregnant remark, that Spinoza's error lay in regarding God as substance, and not as spirit.

Before passing to the more explicit statement of the development of self-consciousness—*i.e.*, to the systematic portion of the 'Wissenschaftslehre'—it may be remarked that in this notion of the Ego as both abstract unity and concrete fulness, we have the transition from the Kantian to the later philosophy of Hegel. For Hegel as for Fichte, philosophy is the systematic development of thought from its most abstract moment to the fulness and wealth of real existence, and the culminating point is the complete consciousness of thought as that which, systematically developed, is the reality of existence. In treatment of many problems the two thinkers differ; in matter, and to a large extent in form, they are at one.

### 3.—FIRST PRINCIPLES OF 'WISSENSCHAFTSLEHRE.'

As science of science, or theory of that which is presupposed in all consciousness, Wissenschaftslehre must take its origin from that which is in itself unsusceptible of proof. Its first principle cannot be a proposition for which reasons can be advanced; it cannot even be the expression of a fact which is given in experience; but it must express that which lies at the basis of all experience, of all consciousness. The matter of the first principle must therefore be unconditioned, and equally so the form. We may indeed assume that alongside of this absolutely unconditioned first principle, two other propositions may be given, two expressions of necessary



acts in the development of self-consciousness,—the one, unconditioned in form though determined as regards matter; the other, unconditioned in matter, though determined as regards form. More than these three there cannot be assumed; all other propositions in the theory of consciousness must be deducible from them.

What, then, is the first principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*? Evidently, from the exposition already given of the nature of this science, the first principle can be nothing but an explicit statement of the very innermost nature of self-consciousness. For all consciousness, and therefore all experience, is determined by self-consciousness, and stands under it as its supreme condition. The first truth must therefore be the express statement of that fundamental activity by which consciousness comes to be. Beyond all doubt this fundamental activity is not to be thought as an object in consciousness, as one of the facts which we may discover by inner observation. As opposed to all the mechanical necessity under which facts appear for us, this activity is freedom as such,—pure action, which, indeed, is or has being, but is not to be regarded as being.

The explicit statement of this fundamental activity is reached in Fichte's first systematic work, the '*Grundlage des Wissenschaftslehre*,' by a somewhat artificial method; and unfortunately, the few pages containing the application of this method not only exhaust the ordinary student's knowledge of the system, but supply almost all that is given of Fichte's doctrine in the ordinary histories of philosophy. To this cause one must refer much of the misunderstanding which has undoubtedly existed regarding the true nature of Fichte's speculative work.

The method is certainly artificial, but as the activity in question is absolutely unconditioned, there is not, as it were, any one defined road by which it is to be approached. Fichte, accordingly, proposes to take an undeniable fact of ordinary, empirical thought, and by criticism to show what is implied in it. The fact selected is the well-known logical or formal law of identity,—A is A. A is A; that is, independently of all material considerations as to what A may be, this at least is true, that it is itself,—it is A. But such a purely formal proposition makes no assertion regarding the positing or affirming of A. It asserts merely that *if* A is posited, then it is  $=A$ : in other words, it asserts the absolute and unconditioned validity of a certain *nexus* or bond  $=x$ . The *nexus* or bond, the law according to which we judge that A is A, is only in consciousness, is only for the Ego; consequently the proposition  $A=A$  may be expressed thus: A is for the Ego simply and solely by virtue of being affirmed or posited in the Ego; and the *nexus* ( $x$ ), the ground of this identity, is the affirmation of the existence of the Ego, *I am*. Only in and for a consciousness that is aware of its own identity, can the law  $A=A$  have validity. The unity and identity of self-consciousness thus lies at the basis of all empirical consciousness, for all empirical consciousness falls under the rule,  $A=A$ . But if the proposition  $A=A$ , valid for all empirical consciousness, has validity only because it is grounded on the fact of the identity of self-consciousness,  $Ego=Ego$ , this identity must be the pure act of the Ego itself, the mere expression or product of the activity by which the Ego is the Ego at all. Self-affirmation, then, is given simply, unconditionally, as the

being of the Ego. The Ego is, because it posits itself as being; it posits itself as being, because it is. The fundamental activity of all consciousness is thus the affirmation of itself by the Ego. "The Ego posits originally and simply its own being."<sup>1</sup>

The method of arriving at this first proposition,—one absolutely unconditioned in matter as in form, for the Ego is the common condition of all matter of consciousness in general, and the affirmation of its self-identity, the form of the proposition, is not prescribed to it from without,—is otherwise given by Fichte in his later expositions.<sup>2</sup> In them the reader is called upon to make the experiment of thinking any given object, and then of thinking the Ego. In the first act, the characteristic feature is the definite and recognised distinction in consciousness between the subject thinking and the object thought. In the second, it is equally plain that the Ego thought and the Ego thinking are one and the same.

△ The activity of thought is reflected upon itself, and in  
 f this reflection upon self consists the very essence of the  
 c Ego, or of self-consciousness. "The procedure of Wissenschaftslehre is the following: it requires each one to note what he necessarily does when he calls himself, I. It assumes that every one who really performs the required act, will find that he *affirms himself*, or, which may be clearer to many, *that he is at the same time subject and object*. In this absolute identity of subject and

<sup>1</sup> 'Werke,' vol. i. p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> In the two "Introductions to Wissenschaftslehre," in the 'New Exposition,' and in the 'Sonnenklarer Bericht.' The posthumous "Exposition from the year 1801" ('Werke,' vol. ii. pp. 1-162) contains in its first part (§§ 1-29) a most elaborate but excessively complicated and obscure analysis of the same fundamental condition.

object consists the very nature of the Ego. The Ego is that which cannot be subject, without being, in the same indivisible act, object—and cannot be object, without being, in the same indivisible act, subject; and conversely, whatever has this characteristic, is Ego; the two expressions are the same.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus the first proposition is the explicit statement of that which underlies all consciousness,—of the act whereby consciousness is possible. It is the same proposition which implicitly had appeared in the critical philosophy under the term unity of apperception; but the full significance of it had not been developed by Kant. Beyond this truth no philosophy can go, and all true philosophy depends upon the recognition of it. Any metaphysical theorem which assumes an origin or cause for consciousness transcending this first, primitive affirmation of the Ego by itself, is self-convicted of incompleteness and absurdity.

It is perhaps needless to note that the Ego referred to is not to be identified with the individual or person. Each individual or person has in common the consciousness of self, without which he exists not at all; but to be individual or person, more is required than is contained in self-consciousness. Accordingly, as we shall later see, although Fichte will not deny to God self-consciousness in the sense here analysed, he will not admit that God is personal or individual. To identify any one thing or person with self-consciousness is absurd. Self-consciousness is not a thing or fact to be observed; just as little is God one among the objects of

<sup>1</sup> ‘*Werke*,’ vol. ii. pp. 441, 442. Cf. ‘*Werke*,’ vol. i. pp. 522, 523, 529.

experience to be thought of as coexisting with finite spirits, conditioning or determining them, and in turn conditioned or determined by them. There is, and can be, from the position of pure thought, no God except the ideal system which is involved in self-consciousness, and in which finite spirits have a definite place and function.

The fundamental mode of activity, the position of the Ego by itself, if regarded *in abstracto*, is the logical law of identity—*i.e.*, no identity of object can be thought apart from the identity of the thinking self. If regarded as in application to objects, it is the category of reality. All reality is in and for the Ego. The categories are merely the necessary modes of action of self-consciousness viewed objectively, or in relation to the object.

Alongside of this first principle, which is unconditioned both in matter and in form, there may be placed for the purposes of the *Wissenschaftslehre* two further principles, one unconditioned in form but conditioned in matter, the other conditioned as to form but unconditioned as to matter. By an artificial procedure resembling that adopted in the case of the first principle, Fichte brings forward the second, on the nature and position of which the greatest misconception has prevailed.

As certainly as the proposition,  $A = A$ , appears in empirical consciousness, so certainly appears the allied but distinct proposition, Not- $A$  does not  $= A$ . This proposition is not to be taken as a mere reduplication in negative form of the rule of identity; it is not equivalent to the judgment, Not- $A =$  Not- $A$ . For there is implied in it a new element, Not- $A$ , and a totally new and distinct



act, that of opposing to A its negative, Not-A. So far as matter is concerned, the proposition is determined ; for if there is to be op-positing at all, that which is opposed to A can only be Not-A. But the form of the proposition, the act of negation, is not conditioned by the form of affirmation. Now, if we treat this proposition as we treated the first, resolving it into its ultimate terms, we have as result the opposition, in the Ego, of Ego and non-Ego. In the Ego, the non-Ego is opposed to the Ego. This second proposition is fundamental in the Fichtean philosophy, but at the same time its significance is not immediately evident. On the one hand, it is clear what is not to be understood by the non-Ego in question. The non-Ego is not the thing-in-itself. It is impossible and contradictory that the Ego should affirm for itself the being of that which, by definition, is not for the Ego. On the other hand, it is not yet plain, and, indeed, it only becomes plain from much later developments of the system, what is the precise nature of the act of opposing or negating. The obscurity which rests over the proposition arises from two sources. In the first place, Fichte accepts, as given, a fact of empirical consciousness, the fact of difference or opposition, and shows that for a self-conscious subject, the ultimate ground of all difference is the distinction of self and not-self. No opposition or difference in empirical knowledge is conceivable, if the Ego has not in itself the moment of difference. As mere abstract statement of what is implied in real consciousness, the proposition has, therefore, unconditioned truth ; but it has not thereby been made clear how real consciousness, which is determined or limited, is related to the pure unity of self-consciousness

as such. All limitation is negation—this is fundamental for Fichte as for Spinoza, and in the second proposition the ground of the maxim is given—but it is not thereby explained why or how there should be limitation at all. In the second place, the all-important distinction between the abstract and concrete moments of self-consciousness is easily overlooked. Fichte is here giving expression to the most abstract aspect of consciousness, which becomes real or concrete only after the introduction of many other elements. The non-Ego referred to is the abstract aspect of that which in the further movement of thought presents itself as the world of objects, but it is not in itself the concrete, represented world.

The first proposition, as was said, is not in Fichte's later expositions approached in the artificial manner adopted in the 'Grundlage;' still less is this the case in regard to the second fundamental act. In the later works, specially in the 'Darstellung aus dem Jahre, 1801,' and in the posthumous lectures, the statement is much more concrete and intelligible. Self-affirmation of the Ego is the primitive activity of consciousness. But such primitive activity is in itself but the ground of consciousness. The Ego, to be real, must be aware of its own activity as affirming itself. This becoming aware of its own activity Fichte calls *reflection*; and it is easily seen that the essential feature of reflection is self-limitation of the Ego. But limitation is negation; the Ego becomes aware of its own activity as self-positing only in and by opposition to self. Infinite activity—*i.e.*, activity related only to itself—is never, as such, conscious activity. "Consciousness works through reflection, and reflection

is only through limitation.”<sup>1</sup> So soon as we reflect upon the activity of the Ego, the Ego is necessarily finite; so soon as the Ego is conscious of its finitude, it is conscious of striving beyond these limits, and so of its infinitude. Were the question raised, Is the Ego, then, infinite? the Ego, by the very question, is finite. Is the Ego finite? then, to be aware of finitude, it is necessarily infinite; and so on, in endless alternation.

The abstract expression of this alternation between subject and object as in relation to one another, is contained in the third fundamental proposition,—that from which the Wissenschaftslehre definitely takes its start.

The second proposition has brought forward a non-Ego, which is in every respect the negative of the Ego. Whatever is affirmed regarding the one must be explicitly denied of the other. But, if we consider our two propositions, we shall find not only that they contradict one another, but that each proposition, taken in respect of the other, contradicts itself. For if the non-Ego is posited, the Ego is negated; but the Ego is absolute reality, and consequently the non-Ego is only posited through the Ego. The Ego, therefore, both posits and negates itself. It is in itself a contradiction, or unites contradictions in itself. It is evidently impossible that both can be negated; it is equally impossible that one should be negated by the other. The only solution is to be found in some act of the Ego by which it is limited as regards the non-Ego, and by which the non-Ego is limited as regards the Ego: the Ego shall, *in part*, negate the non-Ego; the non-Ego shall, *in part*, negate the Ego. So cer-

<sup>1</sup> Werke,’ vol. i. p. 269. Cf. ‘Darstellung, a. d. J., 1801, §§ 17, 28, 29; ‘Nachgelassene Werke,’ vol. i. p. 79; vol. ii. pp. 339, 349.

tainly, therefore, as the two fundamental propositions are true, as certainly can they be combined in the unity of self-consciousness, only if the Ego posit in itself a divisible Ego as limited by a divisible non-Ego. In this third proposition the form is conditioned, for by the needs of the prior maxims it is prescribed what the activity must be ; the matter is unconditioned, for the notion by which the union is effected—that of limitation—is not prescribed beforehand. The third proposition, therefore, completes the principles of *Wissenschaftslehre* : henceforth each step in the evolution of self-consciousness can and must be proved to follow with demonstrative evidence from them.

Moreover, the connection of the three principles, and especially the mode by which the third of them was attained, shows clearly what must be the method of evolution. The very essence of self-consciousness, in its double moments of self-position and reflection, is the union of contradictory aspects. Thesis and antithesis are the formal expressions of the activity lying at the root of consciousness. But contradictions can only be for a self-conscious subject when united or contained in some more concrete synthesis. Limitation has manifested itself as the first synthesis ; but, narrowly examined, the members there united will be seen to manifest new contradictions, which again require to be resolved into some richer, more concrete notion. The course of procedure is thus the continuous analysis of the antithetical moments of each notion, and the synthetical union of them : the goal is the complete synthetical union of the original opposition of the Ego and the non-Ego in consciousness. Term after term will be introduced, until at last the gap between

these two is filled up, and the final synthesis either attained or the full ground for its unattainability made clear. The successive acts by which the new synthesis comes forward, yield, *in abstracto*, the forms of the categories, which will thus be deduced systematically, not accepted haphazard, as in the critical philosophy. The successive modes of consciousness, in and through which the categories receive application to objects, will be rigorously developed, and not taken from empirical psychology. Wissenschaftslehre is thus not only logic, in the highest sense of the term, but also a *phenomenology* or pragmatic history of consciousness.

#### 4.—DEVELOPMENT OF THE SYSTEM.

The fundamental principles contain the groundwork, not only of the developed system of the Wissenschaftslehre in its earlier form, but also of the more abstruse metaphysical view to which Fichte, at a later period, advanced. The union of opposites, as the very essence of consciousness, and the reference of the opposed members to the identity of the absolute Ego, although very differently expressed, remain common ground for both the earlier and the later systematic treatments. In the first form of Wissenschaftslehre, however, the interest centres mainly in the deduction of the consequences involved in the original synthesis; in the later exposition, the synthesis itself, as a whole, is interpreted in a new and more concrete fashion.

As it is impossible here to follow the details of the elaborate and compressed reasoning by which Fichte, in the 'Grundlage' and 'Grundriss des Eigenthümlichen d. Wissenschaftslehre,' traces the successive stages or aspects



of thought contained in the primitive synthesis, it will be advisable to preface a summary of his results by a freer and less technical statement of their significance.

The original synthesis—in the Ego, the divisible Ego is opposed to the divisible non-Ego—evidently contains two propositions, each of which may be subjected to analytic treatment;<sup>1</sup> for, in the first place, it is implied in our proposition that the Ego posits the non-Ego as determined by the Ego; and in the second place, it is implied that the Ego posits itself as determined by the non-Ego. The second of these is the fundamental proposition for the theoretical Wissenschaftslehre—that is, it expresses the very essence of the Ego as intelligence generally. The first is the expression of the essence of the Ego as practical. The ultimate synthesis must be found in that notion in which the theoretical and practical activities of the Ego are identified. At the present stage, such ultimate synthesis appears problematical in fact, and scarcely conceivable in thought. The approach to it must be effected by following out the two isolated expressions according to the general method already recognised. We may thus hope to make clear, first, what the non-Ego, as in thought, must be for the Ego; in other words, we may hope to obtain a complete survey of the formal determinations of thought in and through which it is possible for a non-Ego to be presented to intelligence. How there should be a non-Ego at all will not thereby be explained; but for solution of this problem we may

<sup>1</sup> The *treatment* is analytic, inasmuch as we reflectively expound the oppositions contained in a given synthesis; but the act of consciousness through which these oppositions are given and resolved, is not analytic, but a continuous series of synthetic combinations.

look, in the second place, to the development of the nature of the Ego as practical.

Theoretical Wissenschaftslehre is thus the systematic development of the form of consciousness in which Ego and non-Ego are opposed, and so opposed that the Ego is determined by the non-Ego. Opposition of this kind between Ego and non-Ego is the characteristic feature of cognitive consciousness or intelligence. We may therefore express the business of the theoretical Wissenschaftslehre as the analysis of the notions, categories, or necessary modes of action of intelligence, implied in, and making up, the essence of the recognition of a non-Ego by the Ego. Popular thinking or philosophical theory employs various notions in its effort to explain the relation between Ego and non-Ego. The Wissenschaftslehre has to deduce these notions, to assign to them their value by exhibiting them in their due place as stages or aspects of thought, and systematically to develop them from the fundamental antithesis. The results of the Wissenschaftslehre, so far as it is theoretical, are purely formal; and Kant was in a measure correct when he described Wissenschaftslehre as mere logic. But it was Kant's mistake, and it has been the mistake of most critics of the system, to confine their view to one limited aspect of it. Fichte was well aware that the deduction of the categories, which he was the first to undertake in a genuinely philosophical fashion,—nay, that the exposition of the modes of subjective thinking, such as representation, understanding, judgment, reasoning,—can have, within the limits of theoretical Wissenschaftslehre, nothing but formal worth. It was for him a simple and incontrovertible truth, that knowledge, *as knowledge*,

is of necessity opposed to, and distinct from reality. Such opposition is the very essence of knowledge ; and if it can be shown—as Fichte thought it could be shown—that this opposition necessarily assumes in the Ego the form of representation (*Vorstellung*), then it is absolutely certain that for the cognitive Ego there are only representations. *Reality* is given only in immediate perception, or in the element of *feeling*; and feeling is practical, not theoretical. The logical categories, which alone give significance for intelligence to the non-Ego, do not contain in themselves the element of fact ; and were there no practical Wissenschaftslehre, philosophy would remain where it had been left by Kant,—for Kant had seen that the affection of sense was indispensable if real concrete matter were to be supplied for the action of intelligence, but he had attempted no deduction of *affection*. It remained, in his system, a foreign ingredient ; and his incompetent followers had, without hesitation, assigned the thing-in-itself as ground of explanation. From the very outset of his speculation, Fichte had maintained that in his system alone was to be found the solution for the difficulty left by Kant,—that sensuous affection was there shown to be a necessary element for intellectual function, and that sensuous affection was there deduced from the Ego, though not from the Ego as cognitive.

“The intellectual intuition from which we have started is not possible without sensuous intuition, and this not without feeling. It is a total misunderstanding of my meaning, and a simple reversal of the very meaning and purport of my system, to ascribe to me the opposed view. But sense, intuition, and feeling are just as impossible without intellectual intuition. I cannot

*be for myself* without being something (*etwas* = a definite somewhat), and I am this only in the world of sense ; I can just as little *be for myself* without being Ego,—and this I am only in the intelligible world, which discloses itself to me through intellectual intuition. The point of union between the two lies in this, that what I am in the first, I am for myself only through absolute self-activity regulated by thought. Our existence in the intelligible world is the moral law ; our existence in the world of sense is actual fact : the combining link is freedom, as absolute ability to determine the latter through the former.”<sup>1</sup> For this reason Fichte found himself on so many points in harmony with Jacobi, whose general tendency in speculation was otherwise opposed. For this reason he frequently employs expressions that are easily misunderstood, but which sound as though his philosophy were one of so-called Common-sense. The point is of the last importance, and if not kept in view, a totally false impression of the system will be obtained.

In the theoretical Wissenschaftslehre, therefore, we may expect, first, a pure logic of the notions through which the non-Ego is for the Ego ; and, second, a genetic or pragmatic history of the forms of thinking in which the non-Ego is apprehended. The course of the deduction of the notions is the following :—

The proposition—The Ego posits itself as determined by the non-Ego—yields, on analysis,<sup>2</sup> the opposed expressions, The Ego is passive as determined by the non-Ego ;

<sup>1</sup> “Sittenlehre,” ‘Werke,’ vol. iv. p. 91. Cf. ‘Werke,’ vol. i. pp. 253, 266, 301, 464, 474, 492.

<sup>2</sup> See note p. 164 above for the significance of analysis as here employed.

and, The Ego, positing itself, is active. Not only is each of these expressions a contradiction in itself, but they are mutually contradictory, and, if the unity of consciousness is to be preserved, must be united through some synthetic and more concrete notion. Such notion is readily seen to be but a richer form of the category of limitation or determination, from which the opposites took their rise. The Ego is partly determined, partly determines itself. So much reality as the Ego posits in itself, so much does it negate in the non-Ego; so much reality as it posits in the non-Ego, so much does it negate in itself. This notion, in which Ego and non-Ego are thought as mutually determining, is called by Fichte the category of Reciprocal Determination (*Wechsel-bestimmung*).

But the expressions which have been united in this second synthesis are themselves contradictory. Each, therefore, must be analytically treated and synthetically solved, while a final synthesis will result from the combination of the notions so reached,—a final synthesis which shall take up, in a developed form, the category of reciprocal determination. The first expression, The non-Ego determines the Ego, contains, as antithetical elements, The non-Ego has reality, for only so can it determine the Ego; and, secondly, The non-Ego has no reality, for it is only negation of the Ego, which alone has reality. Now, the positing of the Ego, through which it has reality, is pure activity. The non-Ego, as negation of the Ego, can, therefore, have reality, not in itself, but only in so far as the Ego is passive or negatively active. The notion which thus effects the desired synthesis is that of causality,—for the non-Ego may thus be thought as hav-



ing reality in so far as the Ego is *affected* (or passive). Reciprocal determination in this new notion acquires greater definiteness, for the *order* of determination is fixed. The one factor has positive, the other negative, activity.

The second expression, The Ego determines itself, likewise contains antithetical elements—viz., The Ego is determining, and therefore active,—The Ego determines itself, and is therefore passive. Now the Ego, as *positing*, is the sum of all reality, and therefore of activity. But, *as positing*, it posits a definite portion of this total sphere of reality, and every definition is negative as respects the whole. The Ego, therefore, is passive through its own activity. As sum of reality and activity, the Ego is substance; a definite portion of the sphere of reality or activity is accident. The new notion, the synthesis of substance, thus gives a fresh definiteness to the category of reciprocal determination. The passivity of the Ego is determined through its activity.

The two syntheses—that of causality, in which the Ego is passive through activity of the non-Ego, and that of substance, in which the Ego is passive through its own activity—are the two most important propositions in the theory of knowledge; for they are the abstract expressions for the counter-views of dogmatic realism and subjective idealism. If the relation of Ego and non-Ego is thought simply through the notion of causality, all representation (*Vorstellung*) is regarded as the effect of an objective system of things. If the relation is thought through the notion of substance, all representations are viewed as states of the Ego.<sup>1</sup> Neither view

<sup>1</sup> As above noted, p. 127, Spinoza (or Locke) may be taken as rep-

is coherent : for the theory of representation as effect of the non-Ego does not explain how such representation should be thought *by* the Ego ; and the theory of representation as state of the Ego does not explain why the Ego should oppose to itself a non-Ego. They are, moreover, mutually destructive. A new synthesis must be found, wherein shall be contained the antithetical elements,—passivity of the Ego as determined by activity of the non-Ego,—passivity of the Ego as determined by its own activity. Realism and idealism must be united in ideal-realism.

The exposition of this new synthesis, extending over some seventy pages of the closest reasoning, interrupted by frequent digressions, and complicated by divisions, subdivisions and cross divisions, is the hardest and most involved portion of the ‘*Wissenschaftslehre*.’ Divested, so far as possible, of its technical terminology, the result may be presented somewhat as follows. The Ego and non-Ego have now appeared in thought as mutually determining and determined, and the final relation between them may be expressed in the notion of reciprocal action and passion (*Wechsel-That-und-Leiden*). But such a relation can only be for intelligence, if there be given some activity of consciousness which is at once determining and determined,—which shall at once posit the Ego as limited by the non-Ego, and the non-Ego as the limit of the Ego. The Ego itself is pure activity, total reality. The new act must therefore mediate each of the two opposed factors. It must affirm the non-Ego as limiting, determining the Ego ; and at the same time, representing the first view, Berkeley or Leibnitz as representing the other.

same time must affirm or posit this limitation, as a limitation of the Ego. The limit shall be posited only in so far as the Ego is affirmed as passive; the Ego shall be affirmed only in so far as the limit is posited. This activity, by which the infinitude of the Ego is limited, this activity which continuously mediates between the opposites of infinitude and finitude—for the Ego is infinite, but, as reflective, as conscious of itself, it is finite—Fichte describes by the term already familiar to students of Kant, Productive Imagination. It is the necessary activity of thought by which definiteness, or determinateness, becomes possible for thought. By it alone the Ego becomes subject and has the object over against it. Subject and object are, in fact, the opposites of Ego and non-Ego as appearing in theoretical cognition. No subject without an object; no object without a subject. Productive imagination it is which wins for us definite things from the “void and formless infinite.” All reality is for us through imagination—a proposition which may afford matter for reflection to those who assume that a speculative philosophy in any way endeavours to transcend experience. The product of imagination, the representation (*Vorstellung*), is at once objective, for it can only be thought as related to the non-Ego—and subjective, for it is only for the reflective subject. Hence arises that curious and most obscure property of *Vorstellungen*, that they are invariably thought as representations of some reality; hence arises, for us, the opposition between the subjective and objective orders of experience.<sup>1</sup> A thing, logically regarded, is but a com-

<sup>1</sup> See ‘Werke,’ vol. ii. pp. 400, 401. The whole tract, ‘Sonnenklarer Bericht,’ is an essay on external perception, which might with

plex of relations envisaged in imagination—*i.e.*, represented or definitely embodied.<sup>1</sup>

“All difficulties,” Fichte concludes, “are thus satisfactorily solved. The problem was, to unite the opposites, Ego and non-Ego. Through the faculty of imagination, which unites contradictories, these may be completely reconciled. The non-Ego is itself a product of the self-determining Ego, and not anything posited as absolute and external to the Ego. An Ego that posits itself *as* self-positing—*i.e.*, as a subject—is impossible without an object produced in the fashion just described (the very characteristic of the Ego, its reflection upon itself as a definite somewhat, is possible only under the condition that it limit itself through an opposite). There remains over only the question how and by what means the limit, which is here assumed as explaining representation for the Ego, comes to be at all. This question lies beyond the limits of the theoretical Wissenschaftslehre, and is not to be answered within them.”<sup>2</sup>

Faculty of productive imagination is, therefore, the fundamental cognitive activity.<sup>3</sup> It is, however, only

advantage be compared with our English analyses of the same problem.

<sup>1</sup> ‘Werke,’ vol. i. p. 443.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 218.

<sup>3</sup> This productive imagination, it may be pointed out, is virtually identical with Beck’s original synthetical act. The whole question of productive imagination in the scheme of the Kantian theory of knowledge requires to be more thoroughly worked than has yet been done. Useful contributions to the solution are given by Frohschammer, ‘Ueber die Bedeutung der Einbildungskraft in der Philosophie Kant’s und Spinoza’s, 1879’ (which does not appreciate fully the place of imagination in Spinoza’s scheme); and, more recently, by Mainzer, ‘Die kritische Epoche in der Lehre von der Einbildungskraft aus Hume’s und Kant’s theoretischer Philosophie, 1881.’

the ground of *Vorstellung*; the more definite qualifications of representation are due to other activities of consciousness. These Fichte proceeds to trace with much minuteness, giving what he describes as a "pragmatic history of consciousness." The 'Grundriss des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre,' in particular, contains an extraordinarily minute analysis and description of sensation and intuition, with a much more detailed deduction of the forms of intuition than is put forward in the 'Grundlage.' The characteristic feature of the treatment is the continuous reference of the processes described on the one hand to the non-Ego, as to that with which they are concerned; on the other hand, to the Ego, as to that by which they are posited or exist. The successive acts are, in truth, stages in the development of productive imagination, and arise through the continuous reflection of the Ego upon each of the stages. The treatment is thus what in Fichte's system would correspond to psychology.

The lowest stage, the first moment of the process by which the Ego becomes definitely conscious of the opposition involved in its nature, is that in which the Ego finds itself limited or rendered passive. This *state* or condition—for the Ego is not reflectively aware of the activity which is, nevertheless, involved in it—is sensation (*Empfindung*). All sensation is accompanied by the feeling of the passivity of the Ego—*i.e.*, by the feeling of constraint or necessity. This feeling of compulsion, enriched by other products of the reflective energy of the Ego, is an essential element in the belief in external reality.

Sensation, however, though a passive state, is only for



the Ego ; the Ego reflects upon its own state, and there is thus introduced the distinction between self and not-self, which is the characteristic feature of all reflection. The sensation taken reflectively, and thereby referred to the non-Ego, is *intuition* (*Anschauung*). As the Ego is not reflectively aware of the activity by which it so objectifies sensation, it is, in the process of intuition, absorbed or sunk in the contemplation of the object.<sup>1</sup> The intuition, however, is, equally with sensation, for the Ego ; and the Ego, becoming reflectively aware of intuition as an activity, a product of its own, so converts intuition into a subjective fact, a mental representation or image (*Bild*). The twofold action of the Ego in reflection upon intuition—that by which it contemplates intuition as the object, that by which subjectively it is aware that the intuition is a mental fact—explains the thought-relation between the external object as the original, and the intuition as its copy or representative, and also explains the distinction we draw in consciousness between inner and outer intuition. Outer intuition is the process thought as determined with respect to the content or attributes of its product ; inner intuition, the process thought as subjectively mine, and therefore free or unconstrained as to mode of action by the object. There thus arises for consciousness the important difference between necessity and contingency in the sphere of intuition,—a difference which rests upon and implies the distinction of intuitions from one another, their reciprocal determination, and the determined sequence of acts of intuition. The condition under which distinction of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 'Werke,' vol. ii. pp. 373 *et seq.*, for a more elaborate exposition of this feature of Intuition.

intuitions as objects from one another is possible is space; the condition under which determined acts of intuition are possible is time.<sup>1</sup>

Intuition, as such, is not yet a fixed product for the Ego. The productive imagination, of which intuition is a mode, fixes nothing. The definite fixing or relating of intuitions is the work of understanding (*Verstand*), and all reality for cognition is in and through the understanding. The modes of fixing are the categories already deduced as involved in the very essence of consciousness, and Fichte is thus enabled to show what Kant had failed to do,—that category, schema, and intuition are organically united; that the categories are not empty forms into which matter is thrown from without, but arise with the objects themselves.

The understanding, of which the products are thoughts or notions, is itself subject to reflection, and to a reflection which is, as opposed to understanding, abstractive or free. The reflective action of the Ego upon the whole world of objects of understanding is judgment (*Urtheilskraft*). The highest stage of consciousness is reflection upon judgment, for in this, abstraction is made of all save the Ego itself. The Ego in its pure abstraction and consciousness of self is reason (*Vernunft*). The more complete this power of abstraction, this withdrawal from objectivity, the more closely does the empirical approach pure consciousness.

The theoretical Wissenschaftslehre has developed completely the *form* of cognition, and has shown that this

<sup>1</sup> The deduction of Space and Time, a remarkable piece of analysis, is carried out in great detail in the "Grundriss des Eigenthümlichen," 'Werke,' vol. i. pp. 391-411.

form is an organic or systematic whole. But it has proceeded from a proposition containing an element not yet deduced or explained. The Ego, positing itself as determined by a non-Ego, has been shown to effect this position by a series of necessary, synthetic acts, through which both Ego and non-Ego have appeared as determined and in relations to one another. Alongside of this fundamental proposition, however, there stood a second, equally necessary for consciousness—viz., that the Ego posits itself as determining the non-Ego. The form of cognition rests entirely on the opposition between non-Ego and Ego, but explains in no way the origin of this opposition. The investigation must now be directed upon the second proposition—the foundation of the practical *Wissenschaftslehre*—in order to discover whether in it there may not be given a solution of the presupposition on which the form of knowledge has rested. The practical *Wissenschaftslehre* is not developed by Fichte with the same dialectical vigour as had been manifest in the treatment of knowledge, and the more important doctrines are to be sought, not in the ‘*Grundlage*,’ but in the introductions to the systematic works on Law and Morals.<sup>1</sup>

The Ego as cognitive recognises reality in the non-Ego, and as active or practical, as determining the non-Ego, likewise ascribes reality to it. But how is it possible that there should be for the Ego, which is pure activity, mere self-position, a negation or opposition? How is the primitive act of opposing, already noted as the most obscure and perplexed feature of the system,

<sup>1</sup> Particularly in the “*Sittenlehre*” (‘*Werke*,’ vol. iv.), which is Fichte’s most carefully written work.

possible for the Ego? It would be possible if the Ego were to limit itself,—if in addition to the activity by which the Ego posits itself, there were given another activity — *e. g.*, that of limitation,—for the mode of action of this second activity must necessarily be opposition. If we call the first activity pure, the second may be called objective. The union of pure and objective activity in the Ego would explain the *Anstoss* or opposition upon which all cognition depends. The pure activity, as self-related, is infinite; the objective activity is finite and limitative. If the Ego is to unite both, it must be an infinite activity which is at the same time, though not in the same sense, finite; it must be an infinite *striving*. Striving implies opposition, for without obstacle, without impediment, there is only boundless activity. How shall the infinite activity of the Ego be thought as infinite striving? The Ego is, but it is only for itself. Reflection is thus the very law of existence for a conscious Ego. The Ego is only the Ego, in so far as it reflects. But this reflection is the very limitative obstacle of which the practical Wissenschaftslehre is in search, and the problem is therefore solved. If the Ego be not activity,—infinite self-position,—there can be no striving. If the Ego be not reflective, it cannot be conscious of itself; it remains a *thing*, and not an Ego. Thus the practical activity of the Ego is the ground of the *Anstoss*, which renders intelligence possible; while reflection is the ground of the self-consciousness of the Ego. For an Ego which is not reflective, which is not opposed by a non-Ego, self-consciousness is impossible, and to such an Ego the system of Wissenschaftslehre has no application.

The complete synthesis of the opposed propositions from which the start was made, has now been reached ; the practical and theoretical activities of the Ego are shown to be necessarily related to one another, and to the absolute Ego. Without simple self-position of the Ego—*i.e.*, without the absolute Ego as the idea of all reality—there can be no infinite striving, and without infinite striving, no intelligence. At the root of the infinite striving of the Ego lies the idea of the infinitude of the absolute Ego—an idea which, from the necessary reflection of the Ego, is never completely realised, but towards which there is an endless tendency in the Ego. The Ego, as infinite but reflective activity under the idea of the absolute tendency towards self-realisation, is the practical Ego, and the series of stages throughout which it passes is the ideal series. The Ego, as limited by the non-Ego, but at the same time as continuously transcending this opposition, is theoretical, and the series of stages through which it passes is the real series. “And so the whole nature of finite, rational beings is comprehended and explained. Original idea of our absolute being ; striving towards reflection upon self according to this idea ; limitation,—not of this striving, but of our real being, which is first given through the limitation—through the opposing principle, a non-Ego—or, generally, through our finitude ; self-consciousness, and in particular consciousness of our practical striving ; determination of our representations thereby (with freedom and without freedom) ; through this, determination of our actions—the direction of our real, sensuous existence ; continual extension of the limits to our activity.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ‘*Werke*,’ vol. i. p. 278.



Although all expositions of Fichte's philosophy bring into prominence the fact that for him reason as practical is the ground of reason as theoretical, the significance of the fact, so far as his general theory of knowledge is concerned, does not seem to have received sufficient attention. It has not been seen how the practical side of Wissenschaftslehre bears upon and supplements the proposition from which Fichte never departs—that knowledge is formal only, and that reality is not contained in the form of thought or cognition. Kant had made the same proposition a feature of his system, but had never been able to offer any explanation of it, and manifestly remained under the impression that in Fichte's theoretical Wissenschaftslehre, the attempt was made to extract reality out of mere form of thought.<sup>1</sup> This, however, is by no means the truth. Self-consciousness is only realised in the form of knowledge, but the form of realisation is not the reality itself. Opposition between self and not-self is the necessary form of self-consciousness, but the necessity of the form does not explain the reality attaching to the two factors. It is on this account that Fichte so continuously lays stress on the principle that the primitive datum of consciousness is not a *fact* to be cognised under the necessary form of knowledge, but the product of an *act*; that the essence of the conscious being is not *representation* or knowledge, but activity or freedom, which is cognised under the forms of representation or knowledge. The necessary implication of activity and cognition is, therefore, the answer supplied by him to the problem left unsolved by Kant—the problem of

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 50.

the relation between intellectual function and affection of sense.

In tracing the series of stages through which the practical Ego seeks realisation for itself, Fichte is describing the successive forms of real fact which underlie, and are necessarily involved in, the existence of a self-conscious subject. The complete exposition affords the groundwork for two comprehensive philosophical doctrines—that of Rights or Law, and that of Duties or Morals—while it culminates in a statement as to the bearing of *Wissenschaftslehre* on the fundamental problem of theology.<sup>1</sup> No account can here be given of the systematic treatment of the doctrines of Law and Ethics. It must suffice to indicate how these doctrines are related to the general principles of Fichte's practical philosophy, and in what respects their fundamental notions were altered or amended in the later stage of his speculation.

The Ego, as has been seen, is in essence activity; but at the same time, if an Ego at all, it must posit, affirm, or be aware of its own activity. The twofold aspect of the Ego, as at once activity and reflection upon activity, must ever be kept in mind when the effort is made to trace further the conditions of self-consciousness. As in the case of the several stages of cognition, so here, it will

<sup>1</sup> The general exposition is given in the "Grundlage," 'Werke,' vol. i. pp. 285-328; in the "Naturrecht," 'Werke,' vol. iii. pp. 17-91; in the "Sittenlehre," 'Werke,' vol. iv. pp. 18-156. No work on Fichte's system with which I am acquainted makes any attempt to connect what is put forward in these three quarters, and the omission is doubtless one great cause of the common misconceptions of his theory. The statement here given is too compressed to do justice to the very elaborate analysis contained in the various writings referred to.

be found that the forms of practical activity result from the continuous reflection of the Ego upon the modes and products of its own action. The most general statement which can be made regarding the whole process, sums up what is developed in the successive steps by which the practical Ego realises itself.

Under what conditions can the Ego be conscious of itself? Only in so far as it is practical, in so far as it is a striving force, only in so far as it is will. "The practical Ego is the Ego of original self-consciousness; a rational being immediately perceives itself only in willing; and were it not practical, would perceive neither itself nor the world—would not be an intelligence at all. Will is in a special sense the essence of reason."<sup>1</sup> This striving of the Ego is only possible for consciousness in so far as it is limited or opposed, and the state of consciousness in which this hindrance to striving is posited has already been described as *feeling*. Striving which is opposed, but not absolutely, is impulse (*Trieb*). The very innermost nature of the Ego is therefore impulse. The Ego is a system of impulses. Feeling in which the impulse or force of the Ego is checked, is necessarily a feeling of incapacity or of compulsion, and the combination of the immediate consciousness of our own striving with the feeling of compulsion or restraint is for us the first and most simple criterion of reality. The external thing is for us as real as the activity of the Ego with which it is bound up. "Only through the relation of feeling to the Ego is reality possible for the Ego, whether reality of itself or of the non-Ego. Now, that which is possible only through the relation of feel-

<sup>1</sup> 'Werke,' vol. iii. pp. 20, 21.

ing to the Ego, while the Ego neither is nor can be conscious of its intuition of the same, and which therefore seems to be *felt*, is matter of belief. There is, then, simply belief in reality in general, whether of Ego or of non-Ego." <sup>1</sup>

The Ego, therefore, if it is to be aware of itself, if it is to be self-conscious, must posit itself as acting—*i. e.*, as willing, and as willing freely. This important proposition, which lies at the root of law and morals, may be examined from two sides. We may consider what is necessarily implied or involved in it, and we may consider the conditions under which consciousness of free activity is possible. So far as the first aspect is concerned, the following are Fichte's results. An intelligence can ascribe to itself free activity only if it posit or assume a world external to itself. But to posit or assume a world external to itself seems to imply an activity prior to the activity exercised upon the object,—seems to imply that the activity of the Ego which is free, shall be at the same time determined by a prior fact. Reconciliation of this contradiction is possible only if the Ego be determined to free self-determination, and if the motive or occasioning cause of this free self-determination be itself a rational, active Ego. The Ego, then, cannot become aware of itself as a free, active being, without at the same time positing the existence of another free and active being. Individuality or personality is conceivable only if there be given a multiplicity of individuals or persons, and individuality is a condition of consciousness of self. Nay, further, the recognition

<sup>1</sup> 'Werke,' vol. i. p. 301. Cf. vol. i. pp. 297, 314; vol. ii. p. 263; vol. iii. p. 3.

of individuality, which is possible only in a community of free, active intelligences, demands as its conditions the positing of an external means of realising free activity—*i.e.*, of a material organism or body. The sense world thus receives a deeper interpretation as the common ground or means of communication between free intelligences. A community of free beings, finally, is only conceivable if each regard himself as standing to the others in a certain relation, which may be called that of right or law. The essence of this relation is the limitation by each of his sphere of free activity, in accordance with the notion of a like sphere of free activity as belonging to others. Rights, as Fichte repeatedly insists, are the conditions of individuality.<sup>1</sup>

From this point the philosophical treatment of jurisprudence takes its start. Rights have been deduced from the very nature of self-consciousness, and not from any ethical principle, and the whole science is treated by Fichte in a strictly systematic fashion, as entirely independent of ethics. In this procedure the 'Naturrecht' stands opposed not only to the later developments of his thought, but to the earlier political doctrines of the 'Contributions;' and while the work contains much acute analysis of legal notions, it is, as a whole, fanciful and unsatisfactory. Perhaps the most interesting doctrines are the definite rejection of primitive rights as existing beyond the state, the view of the state as essentially an external mechanism for preserving the condition of right in a freely formed community, the notion of an *ephorat*, or body invested with right of veto on the

<sup>1</sup> See 'Briefwechsel,' p. 166, for a compressed statement regarding the relation of individuality to the notion of the pure Ego.



legislative and executive power, the theory of punishment as purely protective, and the strongly socialist principles for state regulation of property, labour, trade, and money. The 'Geschlossene Handelsstaat,' already referred to, is but the natural appendix to the theory of rights in general.

So far, the consideration of the conditions under which the Ego is conscious of itself has been external. The Ego, conscious of self-existence in willing, is necessarily an individual, standing in relation to other individuals. The consciousness of self as willing must be further analysed. But the consciousness of self as willing is identical with the consciousness of self-activity, with the tendency to act in independence of everything external to self, with self-determination. This is the reality which underlies the intellectual intuition previously noted. Were not the Ego absolute tendency to free activity, there would be no Ego and no self-consciousness. The absolute thought of freedom, self-activity as essence of the Ego, appears in consciousness in the correlative form of all knowledge, as subjective,—in which case it is mere freedom; as objective,—in which case it is necessary determination or law. The union of these in the Ego is the consciousness of freedom as law, the categorical imperative or moral law.

Activity, objectively regarded, is impulse or tendency (*Trieb*). The Ego, as has been already seen, is a system of impulses; its very nature is tendency or impulse. But all tendency of the Ego must at the same time be *for the Ego*—that is, must be reflectively matter of consciousness to the Ego. A tendency of which we are reflectively conscious is a need or want, and when fur-

ther determined in reference to a definite object, a desire. Nature—*i.e.*, our nature—as a system of tendencies, has, therefore, one supreme end, satisfaction of desire, pleasure or enjoyment. The Ego, however, is not merely nature, but consciousness of self, and in so far is independent of objects. It is at once tendency towards objects and tendency towards self-activity, realisation of its own independence. The very essence of the real Ego is the constant coexistence in apparent isolation of the two impulses—natural tendency and tendency towards freedom. Such constant coexistence is not to be thought as a state or condition, but as a process. The final end which is posited by the free self-consciousness—*viz.*, absolute self-dependence, independence of nature—is not one to be realised as a finite state, but to be continually approached in an infinite series. “The Ego can never be independent, so long as it remains an Ego; the final end of a rational being lies necessarily in infinity, and is therefore one never to be attained, but continually to be approached.”<sup>1</sup> The vocation of a finite rational being is not to be regarded as one definite thing, but as a constant, infinite series of vocations, to each of which it is imperatively called. “Continuously fulfil thy vocation,” is therefore the practical expression of the moral law. The immediate feeling of the harmony in any case between the natural tendency and the tendency to freedom is conscience.

The moral law, as the expression of the constant tendency of the Ego towards realisation of the idea of self-consciousness, self-activity, self-dependence, is the ultimate certainty, the ground of all knowledge, and of all

<sup>1</sup> ‘*Werke*,’ vol. iv. p. 149.

practical belief. "The supersensible, of which the reflex in us is our world of sense,—this it is which constrains us to ascribe reality even to that reflex,—this is the true thing-in-itself, which lies at the foundation of all the phenomenal; and our belief is concerned, not with the phenomenal, but with its supersensible foundation. My vocation as moral, and whatever is involved in the consciousness thereof, is the one immediate certainty that is given to me as conscious of self,—the one thing which makes me for myself a reality. . . . Our world is the sensualised material of our duty. . . . What compels us to yield belief in the reality of the world is a moral force—the only force that is possible for a free being."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, as the series of acts by which the theoretical Ego realised itself closed with the formal consciousness of the independent, thinking, reflecting Ego, so here the series of real acts by which the practical Ego realises itself closes with the consciousness of the infinite law of freedom, of duty. The Ego, as individual, as finite and real being, is at the same time the Ego with the idea of its own infinite vocation and the infinite tendency to realise the same. The problem of the *Wissenschaftslehre* has been completely solved; the formal determinations with which it started have received their real interpretation.

It is evident that in the completed system, as here conceived, no place is left for those notions which have played so great a part in human thought—the notions of God as a personal, conscious agent, creative and regulative of things. Such interpretation as theology could receive in *Wissenschaftslehre* was given by Fichte in the

<sup>1</sup> 'Werke,' vol. v. pp. 210, 211.

essay which led to his removal from the University of Jena.<sup>1</sup>

The absolute end of reason has been seen to be the infinite realisation of the moral law. The world of the senses, contemplated from this point of view, is not a reality in itself, but the necessary means for accomplishing the task of reason. It has its foundation in that moral law in which finite intelligences have also their bond of union. Belief in the reality of the moral order of the universe,—conviction that the morally good will is a free and effective cause in the intelligible system of things,—this, and this only, is belief in God. For a rational being, God is the moral order of the universe,—not an order which has its ground external to itself—not an *ordo ordinatus*,—but the order which is the ground of all reality, *ordo ordinans*. To think of this order as object of intelligence is necessarily to bring it under the forms of cognition, to regard it as being, as substance, as person. But such predicates have no validity when applied to the moral order; and even to describe this order as supreme consciousness, intelligence, is but of negative service,—useful as obviating the error of viewing the moral system as a thing, hurtful as tending to inclose in limited notions that which is the ground of all intelligence. The moral order is truly a spiritual order, and in it only our life has reality. All life is its life, and the manifestation of this life is the infinite development of humanity. The life does not exist as a completed fact,—hence the point of view is in no way to be identified with Pantheism or with Spinozism,—but eternally is to be. The individual, finite

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 56-64.

Ego, in acceptance of his position as a member in this supersensible order, realises his infinite vocation, tends more and more to lose his apparent individuality, and approaches ever more nearly to the idea of infinitude which is the characteristic mark of self-consciousness. In this intelligible moral order, the problem of Wissenschaftslehre finds its final solution ; the abstract form of self-consciousness here receives its concrete development and completion.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the passage already quoted (p. 15), in which the twofold aspect of the Ego as abstract starting-point and concrete end is indicated.



## CHAPTER VII.

## LATER FORM OF THE WISSENSCHAFTSLEHRE.

THE result of the Wissenschaftslehre, as stated in the last paragraph, proved far from final, and in fact only served to open out a series of problems, the treatment of which forms the second stage in the development of Fichte's philosophy. As has been already pointed out, it was, historically, the effect produced by his speculations on theology, that compelled Fichte to a renewed consideration of the principles on which the Wissenschaftslehre rested, and the system of knowledge there expounded. The course of his inquiry had led him from the abstract analysis of the acts necessarily involved in the nature of self-consciousness, to the more concrete conception of the essence of reason as recognised dependence on the ultimate moral law. The successive stages had been cognition, in its various forms,—practical reason or will, and the final synthesis in which these were united.

It was now evident that the final synthesis—the concrete reality of reason—required a treatment much more elaborate than it had yet received,—that in the conception of the finite Ego as accepting the infinite vocation

of the moral law, more was implied than the pure self-activity, pure freedom, through which consciousness of this vocation was possible ; and that the relation between knowledge as form, will as ground of reality, and the supreme notion of the divine order, was as yet imperfect. "In a word, there was yet wanting a transcendental system of the intelligible world."<sup>1</sup> From this point onwards the inquiry centres in that divine idea of the world which appears as the guiding principle in the popular works, and which at first sight appears to have no immediate connection with the *Wissenschaftslehre* in its earlier form.<sup>2</sup> In certain minor doctrines, the new expositions differ from the *Wissenschaftslehre* as already described, and the position assigned to moral independence is not exactly the same as that given to it in the 'Sittenlehre,' but on the whole we find nothing in them to contradict or supersede the *Wissenschaftslehre*. They contain a wider, more concrete view, to which *Wissenschaftslehre* may be regarded as an introduction, but essentially this view is but the more complete evolution of what in an abstract fashion had already been stated there. The difficulties in the way of surveying the new treatment, and perceiving its connection with the older doctrine, arise partly from the obscurity of the language in which expression is given to the new thoughts, partly from the varied modes in which the same matter is presented. Fichte, who always laid stress on the fact of unity in his philosophy, approaches the statement from the most varied points, now selecting the

<sup>1</sup> 'Briefwechsel,' p. 333.

<sup>2</sup> See particularly the lectures on the "Nature of the Scholar," 'Werke,' vol. vi., and there pp. 360-371.

ultimate ground of things, now sketching the series of processes by which our thinking reaches this ground, and again taking knowledge as a completed system, and considering what is implied by it.<sup>1</sup> Many of these expositions are before us only in the form of notes for lectures, and it is a task of immense difficulty to follow the line of thought through the disjointed remarks and wilderness of abstruse illustration by which Fichte strove to make his meaning clear.<sup>2</sup>

The work in which we are able to discern, with the utmost precision, the transition from the earlier to the later doctrine, is the '*Bestimmung des Menschen*,' published in 1800.<sup>3</sup> In the three books into which the work is divided, Fichte describes three fundamental views in philosophy: first, that of naturalism or dogmatism; second, that of theoretical idealism; third, that of practical faith or ethical idealism. Naturalism, the systematic development of one notion, that of the reciprocal determination of the several parts of experience, finds itself in absolute conflict with the idea of our own freedom, which is the very essence of consciousness. If it were possible for us to regard consciousness as mere object of knowledge—as a thing—then to it would apply the results of this comprehensive notion. This being impossible, natural necessity and freedom stand

<sup>1</sup> As an instance of the first method, the '*Anweisung zum seligen Leben*' may be selected. For the second, the '*Thatsachen des Bewusstseyns*,' and for the third, the '*Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre aus d. Jahre 1801*,' are the best illustrations.

<sup>2</sup> These lecture-notes make up the bulk of the '*Nachgelassene Werke*.'

<sup>3</sup> A translation into English has been published by Dr W. Smith. See '*Fichte's Popular Works*,' with a Memoir (3d ed. 1873), pp. 237-379. To this references are made.

opposed to one another, and no means of abolishing their opposition appears to be given.<sup>1</sup> In the second book, entitled "Knowledge," the analysis of perception from its subjective side is carried out with a subtlety and exhaustiveness that leave nothing to be desired. Gradually the thinker is led on from the first *naïve* position of intelligence to the conclusion that the whole varied contents of external experience are nothing and can be nothing but *Vorstellungen*, determined modes of intelligence.<sup>2</sup> He is brought to the point at which *Wissenschaftslehre* as theoretical ends; and the interpretation of his position, as here given, is but an expansion of the principle, already noted as fundamental in Fichte, that knowledge is pure form. The process of subjective analysis—*i.e.*, of analysis for cognition,—when carried out rigorously, leaves as result a system of *Vorstellungen*. "There is nothing enduring, either out of me or in me, but only a ceaseless change. I know of no being, not even of my own. There is no being. I myself know not and am not. Pictures there are;<sup>3</sup> they are all that exist, and they know of themselves after the fashion of pictures,—pictures, which float past without there being anything past which they float; which, by means of like pictures, are connected with each other; pictures without anything which is pictured in them, without significance and without aim. I myself am one of these pic-

<sup>1</sup> Hence the title of the first book, "Doubt."

<sup>2</sup> The 'Sonnenklarer Bericht' is an excellent commentary on this second book of the 'Bestimmung.' Together they make a most admirable introduction to philosophical analysis.

<sup>3</sup> The term *picture* must be taken in a metaphorical sense, in order to serve as translation of *Bild*. The English use of the term *idea*, as equivalent to mental picture, would be more satisfactory.

tures; nay, I am not even this, but merely a confused picture of the pictures. All reality is transformed into a strange dream, without a life which is dreamed of, and without a mind which dreams it, into a dream which is woven together in a dream of itself. Intuition is the dream; thought—the source of all the being and all the reality which I imagine, of my own being, my own powers, and my own purposes—is the dream of that dream.”<sup>1</sup> From the point of view of knowledge, there is nothing but knowledge; and knowledge is not reality, just because it is knowledge. In the form of cognition we can never attain to more than formal truth.

With this sceptical conclusion the second book closes. In the third, the transition is effected to the higher, the practical stage of Fichte’s philosophy, by a method partly identical with that already described, but in part containing a new and startling feature. Not knowledge only, but action, is the end of existence. The restless striving after a reality which is not given in thought, has significance only in reference to the active, energetic power by which self endeavours to mould the world to its own purposes. But if we endeavour to subject this feeling of free self-activity, of independent purpose, to the analysis of reason, the sceptical doubts regarding knowledge return with their former force. It is conceivable that the distinction of the self willing and the conditions under which the volition is to be realised—the twofold aspect of all will, as thought and as act—may be nothing but the form imposed by cognitive consciousness on the operation of some unknown external power. Through this sceptical reflection, “all earnest-

<sup>1</sup> P. 309.



ness and interest is withdrawn from my life, and life, as well as thought, is transformed into a mere play, which proceeds from nothing and tends to nothing." No exit is left, save that of resolute acceptance of the inner command to act, and act freely. We must have faith in this impulse to independence, which is the very innermost secret of our nature. Thought is not supreme, but is founded on our striving energies. Unhesitating acceptance of our vocation and of the conditions implied in it—through this only has life reality for us. "There is something that must be done for its own sake—that which conscience demands of me in this particular situation of life it is mine to do, and for this purpose only am I here;—to know it I have understanding; to perform it I have power. Through this edict of conscience only are truth and reality introduced into my conceptions."

Obedience to the law of conscience is the ground of practical belief; and from it follow, as consequences, practical belief in the existence of others, and in the existence of a real external world. To merely speculative cognition, the existence of others and of a world, must be interpreted as only a specific mode of representation; but speculative cognition is abstract and one-sided. Only in reference to action has the existence of another conscious being or of an external thing, significance for us. "We are compelled to believe that we act, and that we ought to act, in a certain manner; we are compelled to assume a certain sphere for this action; this sphere is the real, actually present world, such as we find it. . . . From necessity of action proceeds the consciousness of the actual world; and not the reverse way, from the consciousness of the actual world the necessity of action,"

Action under conscience supposes an end, not prescribed by nature, but to be realised by us in nature. As contrasted with this end, even in its formal aspect, the world of fact presents itself as but a stage in progress towards the more perfect harmony between the conditions of life and the moral rule which is its supreme law. Improvement of nature, development of the powers of humanity, whether in science or culture or state organisation, establishment of the general rule of rational freedom, — these are contained under the comprehensive demand of conscience.<sup>1</sup>

Realisation of itself in this world cannot, however, be looked upon as the one aim of the rational will. For in such realisation in deed or fact, that which is to inner

<sup>1</sup> It is to this point that the lectures on the "Characteristics of the Present Age" attach themselves. In them, the general progress of humanity towards realisation, with consciousness of its earthly aim—"that in this life mankind may order all their relations with freedom according to reason"—is traced in its broad outlines as the foundation for a philosophy of history. In such progress Fichte distinguishes five epochs, or world ages: first, that in which reason acts as *blind instinct*—the state of innocence; second, that in which the growing consciousness of reason presents itself as external authority—the age of positive systems, of progressive sin; third, that in which reason reflectively frees itself from external authority, and so from all general control—the age of individualism, of completed sinfulness; fourth, that in which the rational end is apprehended as reasoned, philosophic truth—the age of reconstruction, of progressive justification; fifth, that in which the rational end, embodied in general consciousness, is artistically developed—in which humanity, with clear consciousness of its own aim, endeavours practically to realise the reign of freedom,—the age of completed justification. Much that is fantastic and unreal is given in these lectures, especially as regards the first stage—the origin of history; but the general view of the progress of practical thought is luminous and instructive, and we note that here the *state* begins to have assigned to it a higher function in the development of human life than had been accorded to it in the earlier work (the 'Rechtslehre').

consciousness the pre-eminent excellence of moral action—the intention or disposition—becomes of no account. “In the world of sense it is never of any moment *how, and with what motives and intentions*, an action is performed, but only *what the action is*.” The mechanism of the world of fact may be the form in which the divine idea partially realises itself, but it cannot be placed as coextensive with the divine idea. Our will must be thought as determined in a supersensible order, and as carrying out in the world of sense, under external conditions, what is there unconditionally demanded. “The earthly purpose is not pursued by me for its own sake alone, or as a final aim, but only because my true final aim—obedience to the law of conscience—does not present itself to me in this world in any other shape than as the advancement of this end.” “This, then, is my whole vocation, my true nature. I am a member of two orders—the one purely spiritual, in which I rule by my will alone; the other sensuous, in which I operate by my deed. . . . The will is the living principle of reason—is itself reason, when apprehended purely and simply. . . . Only the infinite reason lives immediately and wholly in this purely spiritual order. The finite reason—which does not of itself constitute the world of reason, but is only one of its many members—lives necessarily at the same time in a sensuous order—that is to say, in one which presents to it another object beyond a purely spiritual activity—a material object to be promoted by instruments and powers which indeed stand under the immediate dominion of the will, but whose activity is also conditioned by their own natural laws. Yet as surely as reason is reason, must

the will operate absolutely by itself, and independently of the natural laws by which the material action is determined; and hence the life of every finite being points towards a higher, into which the will by itself alone may open the way, and of which it may acquire possession—a possession which indeed we must sensuously conceive of as a state, and not as a mere will.” Thus the true essence of the finite being is his participation in the divine, spiritual order; his true vocation is the continuous approximation of his finite life to the infinite requirements of the law of this spiritual order. The divine will is the bond of union between finite spirits. God, as Malebranche finely said, is the place of spirits.<sup>1</sup>

The divine life or spiritual moral order has thus appeared as involved in the very nature of self-consciousness; it is the reality which, in the earlier exposition of *Wissenschaftslehre* was called the idea of the absolute Ego. A new aspect is thus given to the whole nature of reason, theoretical and practical, for both appear as related necessarily to this ultimate unity. So far as the individual is concerned, there now comes forward, in place of mere formal independence—abstract freedom of thought and self-dependence in action—the free resignation of the individual to the law of the divine order, with love for it and active effort to give its precepts realisation. The position of morality, as expressed in the ‘*Naturrecht*’ and ‘*Sittenlehre*,’ has been transcended and absorbed in that of religion. The will is no longer thought as striving to realise only its own freedom, but

<sup>1</sup> ‘*Rech. de la Vérité*,’ B. III. Pt. ii. ch. 6. “Demeurons donc dans ce sentiment, que Dieu est le monde intelligible ou le lieu des esprits, de même que le monde matériel est le lieu des corps.”

as continuously endeavouring after full harmony between itself and the divine moral order.

The relation between the earlier and later forms of *Wissenschaftslehre* seems, therefore, perfectly intelligible. In the earlier doctrine the ultimate notion lay in advance as something to be reached by laborious analysis, as what is necessarily contained in consciousness. So soon as the ultimate notion had been grasped, the *Wissenschaftslehre*, in the strict sense, became of secondary importance. It had, as Fichte said, the value of a path and no more. The later doctrine, accepting the ultimate idea, the metaphysical unity, to which all knowledge and action, however indirectly, refer, has to develop its consequences, and in the course of the development to show what place is occupied by *Wissenschaftslehre* as at first conceived. That some points of the earlier doctrine receive a new interpretation is certain; that the whole manner of viewing the problem is fresh and original, is equally certain; but it requires little investigation to see that the two expositions are in fundamental agreement, and that the second of them, though, unfortunately, less completely worked out than the first, is the true and final philosophy of Fichte.

It is impossible, within the limits of this sketch, to give any adequate account of the various statements of the new doctrine successively put forward by their ever-active and prolific author. All that can be attempted is a very general description of the results which appear as permanent elements in these statements, and a notice of the difficulties which appear to arise in connection with them. For such a purpose the lectures in the '*Nachgelassene Werke*,' may be omitted; the style in them is



so obscure as to necessitate constant and extended commentary ; and they are, probably, not in a shape in which the author would have wished them to be laid before the public. The most valuable and interesting works are the popular addresses on religion, 'Anweisung zum seligen Leben,'<sup>1</sup> and the treatise, prepared for publication, though not actually published during Fichte's life, on the 'Facts of Consciousness.'<sup>2</sup> The second of these is without doubt the best introduction to the philosophy of the later period. The ultimate metaphysical principle is approached by a careful, genetic analysis of consciousness in its several stages, from immediate external perception to pure thought, in and through which the principle of existence is apprehended. The work stands to 'Wissenschaftslehre' very much in the position in which the 'Phänomenologie des Geistes' stands to Hegel's 'Logic.' From the systematic fashion in which the several problems, arising in connection with the several stages of consciousness, are taken, we can discern with the greatest definiteness the divisions into which Fichte's philosophy now falls, and so trace any resemblance to, or difference from, the earlier doctrines. In the 'Wissenschaftslehre,' these divisions had been two in number, theoretical and practical, corresponding to the two main faculties of thought and action, with a common introduction. The development of the Wissenschaftslehre, circular in nature, had shown that the final synthesis of the theoretical and practical was to be looked for in the more concrete treatment of what had

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Dr W. Smith ('Fichte's Popular Works,' 1873, pp. 381-564). To this references are made.

<sup>2</sup> "Thatsachen des Bewusstseyns," 'Werke,' vol. ii. pp. 535-691.

been contained in the introduction. In the later exposition, this more concrete treatment appears definitely as a third part, following the analysis of the theoretical and practical reason, and dealing specifically with the higher faculty. It is, in brief, metaphysic or theology ; and here only do we find any adequate explanation of the abstract statements with which Wissenschaftslehre started. As was pointed out, Fichte, in the first sketch of his system, adopted an artificial and somewhat forced method for bringing forward his first principle, and the nature of this method tended to perpetuate the misconception under which the whole system laboured. It appeared as if the first principle were, somehow, the expression of an act or activity on the part of the individual ; that reason or consciousness was something possessed by the individual—an accident or attribute of the conscious subject. So long as this conception is suffered to hold its ground, the whole system must appear as one of subjective idealism, and the scheme of forms and categories as nothing but the logical grouping of individual subjective impressions. This, however, is in no sense, Fichte's view, nor was it involved in the earlier Wissenschaftslehre. He is throughout true to the thought which lies at the root of the Kantian and all the post-Kantian philosophy, that the individual subject is not *per se* an independent, self-existent reality, but has his being only in and through reason. The ultimate distinction between self and non-self, on which individuality is dependent, is not made—or, to use the technical term, posited—by the individual reason, but by the universal common reason. “The Ego, as understood in common fashion, posits neither the external object nor itself, but

both are posited through general, absolute thinking, and through this the object is given for the Ego, as well as the Ego for itself. . . . But without exception, *Wissenschaftslehre* has been understood as if it said the very reverse of what has just been laid down.”<sup>1</sup>

The analysis of theoretical cognition in the “*That-sachen*,” contains little or nothing beyond what has already appeared in the earlier *Wissenschaftslehre*, and differs only in the total omission of the somewhat technical phraseology and of the dialectical method there employed. More important modifications, though not alterations, appear in the treatment of the practical faculty, that through which reality is given to the mere form of knowledge.

As in the earlier exposition, the key to the new development is found in the activity of the Ego—an activity of which the Ego must be reflectively conscious, if it is to be Ego at all. The Ego is only conscious of its activity, in so far as that activity is limited or opposed. There thus lie in the consciousness of the Ego the three elements,—feeling of impulse or striving, intuition of activity, and the representation of the obstacle to activity, a representation which is the work of productive imagination. The most abstract expression for this necessary limitation of the activity of the Ego is force contemplated as matter of intuition; and this, again, may be described as matter in general, or corporeality. The essence of the external thing is force, and it is the thought of force as lying behind the specific modes of feeling which we call sensations, that gives to the object of perception its qualification as an external, real fact.

<sup>1</sup> ‘*Werke*,’ vol. ii. p. 562.

The Ego, then, is only conscious of itself as activity in a corporeal world, but to be conscious of itself as active in relation to the corporeal world, it must be for itself corporeal. The body or corporeal organism is the Ego as an objective thing. The Ego is a possible object of intuition only in so far as it is corporeal. At the same time, the Ego exists for itself only in and by reflection, and reflection is in its very essence limitative and separating. The Ego, therefore, can be conceived only as one of many Egos, which are united in thought, but manifold for intuition. A system of individuals, corporeally distinct from one another, is thus the condition under which self-consciousness is realised.

The three main features of the representation of the world as objective have thus been deduced,—a system of Egos, a system of organised bodies of these Egos, a world of the senses. All of these are to be regarded as modes or ways in which the infinite life of consciousness manifests itself. Distinction or difference among them is not absolute, but relative to the nature of finite consciousness. Fichte, therefore, with justice, repudiates certain famous distinctions which have played an unfortunate part in philosophy,—among others, the distinction of soul and body. From the speculative point of view, the soul, as popularly regarded, is but a kind of ghost. Soul and body are the forms under which imagination, or perception, if we prefer a less ambiguous term, contemplates the limited, definite activity of the Ego. At the same time, his view is not to be identified either with materialism, which likewise endeavours to regard all finite existence as the form of some underlying substance—or with subjective idealism, which regards external reality, and

the existence of other Egos, as modes of the individual consciousness. The one system is incapable of explaining consciousness in general; the other fails entirely to render a reason for the difference or multiplicity of experience.

The system of finite spirits into which the one life of consciousness separates itself is, for intuition, a numerical multiplicity, without bond of union. But the physical *nexus*, which is impossible for them, is not to be thought as the only link of connection. The free activity which underlies individual consciousness, is no mere natural force, but, when received into consciousness, is the ethical or moral freedom of the individual spirit; and with the recognition of this ethical freedom—freedom under absolute law—a new view is opened out. In the consciousness of the moral end which is to be realised, the individual is one with the community of individual Egos. The infinite life, if it is to be realised at all, must have expression in individual forms; and each finite spirit is an individual, and is aware of himself as an individual, only in so far as he has individual duties,—a special sphere of moral action. We must therefore think of the infinite life in which we find our place, not as absolute in itself—not as mere capacity of action—but as the means of realising the moral end. The individual finite spirits are the modes in which this infinite life expresses itself,—and each has his definite position, his definite line of action, prescribed for him. No individual is originally or by nature moral; nor can he discover *a priori* what his specific moral vocation is to be. But he becomes moral, or attains to a consciousness of his vocation, in and through the continuous effort



to realise that supreme end which unites him with all other finite spirits in an ethical community. No individual form of the infinite life perishes ; but no individual either is here, or will be in all eternity, an independent being. Immortality is not beyond this life, but in it. "There is no more striking proof that the knowledge of true religion has hitherto been very rare among men, and that, in particular, it is a stranger in the prevailing systems, than this, that they universally place eternal blessedness beyond the grave, and never for a moment imagine that whoever will may here and at once be blessed." <sup>1</sup>

The analysis of consciousness has thus led Fichte to a conclusion resembling in all essentials that already stated in the '*Bestimmung des Menschen.*' The concluding portion of the work <sup>2</sup> introduces a new notion or at least a change of terminology, which has given rise to much misunderstanding, and has caused excellent critics, such as Erdmann, to pronounce the later philosophy out of harmony with the earlier *Wissenschaftslehre*. The infinite life—that which underlies all consciousness—has been seen to be the infinite means of realisation of the supreme moral law. Its form or expression for intuition—that is, its phenomenal manifestation in actual experience—is the world of finite spirits and of nature as the organised limit of these finite individuals. But the infinite life is thus thought only as an endless, continuous change—a conception which is in itself incomplete or imperfect. The infinite life must be thought as being—as

<sup>1</sup> '*Werke,*' vol. vii. p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> "*Thatsachen des Bewusstseyns,*" sect. iii. ch. 5 ; '*Werke,*' vol. ii. pp. 680-691.

having fixity and permanence. It cannot reveal itself, save as the revelation of that which *is*; and its revelation is thus distinct from its being (a distinction, however, which is only for us—*i.e.*, for consciousness). This being, which reveals itself in the infinite life, which manifests itself in the form of individual consciousness or knowledge, which exists not apart from its manifestation, but yet *is* as opposed to this manifestation, is the supreme unity of thought—a unity not to be perfectly comprehended, not to be grasped in thought, but seen to be the ultimate inconceivability. To this supreme unity Fichte gives the significant title—God; and in it he finds the ultimate notion of all consciousness. “Knowledge as a whole, is not mere knowledge of itself; but it is knowledge of being—of the one Being which truly is—*i.e.*, of God. In no way is it knowledge of a being external to God,—for such is impossible beyond the being of knowledge itself or the intuition of God; and the supposition of its existence is pure nonsense. But this one possible object of knowledge is never in its entirety present to knowledge, but appears ever as broken into the necessary forms of knowledge. The exposition of the necessity of these forms is Philosophy or Wissenschaftslehre.”<sup>1</sup>

The obscurity of these detached expressions may be somewhat removed by calling attention more definitely to the exact problem which Fichte now has before him, and by referring for a more detailed treatment to the popular lectures on religion.<sup>2</sup> The problem is in substance the ultimate question into which run all philosophical or theological speculations—that of the relation

<sup>1</sup> ‘Werke,’ vol. ii. p. 685.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Anweisung zum seligen Leben.’

between the finite spirit and the universe, of which he seems to form a part. Whether we call this universe God, or nature, or matter, or force, is of comparatively small moment : its character for us must depend entirely on what we think as the innermost essence of the finite spirit, and on the mode or kind of relation between this finite spirit and the ultimate reality. Now for Fichte it has become apparent, from the mere systematic analysis of consciousness, that the very essence of the finite spirit is the combination of the consciousness of moral determination with the consciousness of practical activity or will ; and that through this, its innermost being, it is one member of the ethical community of spirits, whose sole aim is the infinite and constant effort towards the realisation in nature of the moral end or purpose—the subjection of nature to reasoned freedom. The individual is thus a mode or form of the process by which freedom is realised, and the infinite series of individuals makes up the complete system of modes or forms in and through which the moral life, the divine plan, is to be carried out. No one individual exhausts the possibilities of this divine life ; and as opposed to its infinite being, the existence of any individual must be thought as contingent or accidental. Nevertheless, only in and through the form of individuality—*i.e.*, of self-consciousness—can the divine life receive expression. Thus nature, as object of intelligence, and self-consciousness as the essence of intelligence, appear in their true place. They are modes of the manifestation or realisation of the moral law or ethical end. Things and finite spirits are not to be thought as developments of some inconceivable, mechanical necessity, but as the form in which the moral

order—the highest expression of the reason we find in us—has existence or reality.

It is hardly surprising that, in dealing with this ultimate problem, the terms employed should often fail to convey exactly the significance of the thoughts involved. Theology, which is for the most part a bad mixture of metaphysics and popular conceptions, has suffered more than any other branch of human thinking, from the impossibility of expressing speculative results in the language of ordinary life. For thought, whether popular or general, is in essence abstraction—that is, tendency to separate what is inseparable, to give permanence and apparent independence to that which is transient and dependent. Thus the relation of the infinite moral order to the finite modes in which it takes expression for itself, is hardly to be thought without danger of falling back into the old theological error of severing entirely from one another God and the world of nature and finite spirits. That Fichte altogether escapes this danger cannot be said; but so far as it is possible to judge from all that appears in his later works, he was well aware of the danger; and one must account it an error to ascribe to him the view that Being, or God, or the ultimate reality, is distinct from the manifestation or realisation of it in the world of consciousness.

The special theology or theosophy of Fichte's system, as was said, is most definitely stated in the lectures on the 'Doctrine of Religion,' and what is there given may be accepted as his final utterance on the supreme problem of speculation. As in the earlier *Wissenschaftslehre*, though with much greater fulness and concreteness, the exposition is twofold: first, a logical development

of the relation between the ultimate reality and its form or mode or manifestation ; second, a psychological history of the stages or forms of reflection by which this relation is received into the consciousness of the finite thinking subject—by which it is viewed, apprehended, or understood.<sup>1</sup> It is in this second portion that Fichte begins to connect in one organic whole the elements of his system which, in the earlier *Wissenschaftslehre*, had been suffered to remain detached from one another.

The function of thought, as opposed to mere opinion, is to conceive of being, of the ultimate reality which underlies all objects of knowledge. True being is one, unchangeable and perdurable. But in its unity and unchangeability it does not exist ; it has no reality ; it is mere abstraction. To say merely that God *is*, is to say nothing. The existence or definite realisation of being, that, in and for which only opposition between being and existence is present and necessarily present, is consciousness,—conscious life, the life of knowledge, thought and action. Now in consciousness there is found the root of all the multiplicity of experience ; for the very essence of consciousness is reflection, character-

<sup>1</sup> The mode of exposition adopted by Fichte in the work in question resembles somewhat the well-known method of Schleiermacher's Theology. He proceeds by an analysis of the elements involved in the religious consciousness, the mode of thought in which the apparent reality of the world of sense is recognised as apparent merely ; in which the finite being contemplates, *sub specie aternitatis*, his own existence and the being of all things ; in which he is penetrated with the intellectual love of the real divine life underlying the apparent world ; in which he becomes one with this divine life, and lives and works for it alone. The closing portions of Spinoza's 'Ethics' furnish the best commentary on the 'Doctrine of Religion.'



isation of the one reality by separate, individual marks. Just as light, in itself colourless, is, in relation to the eye, broken up on the surfaces of things into many various hues ; so the unchangeable life is by reflection and in relation to consciousness broken up into infinitely varied forms. Consciousness, which contains in itself the element of opposition, can never transcend itself. To it the one being, apprehended by pure thought *as* the one being, must ever present itself in the form of representation, conception,—in the form of separate individual things. “The visible forms which by this separation are imposed upon absolute reality are discernible only in actual consciousness, and in such a way that in the act of observing them we assign to them life and permanence—and they are by no means discoverable *a priori* by pure thought. They are simple and absolute experience, which is nothing but experience ; which no speculation that understands itself will ever attempt or desire to comprehend.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus the one reality, the one life, the life of consciousness, which is the manifestation of God, breaks itself up into an endless multiplicity of individual forms,—forms which in the experience of the finite spirit must present themselves as independent, self-existing facts, but which for thought are only modes of the one, infinite life. The finite spirit may apprehend this world of phenomena and its relation to the real system by reflective consideration of it ; and of such reflective consideration there are five distinctly marked stages.<sup>2</sup> The first is that in which the

<sup>1</sup> ‘Doctrine of Religion,’ p. 447.

<sup>2</sup> It appears to me beyond doubt that Hegel, in the famous preface to his ‘Phänomenologie,’ has Fichte in view as well as Schelling ; and further, that much in the ‘Phänomenologie’ is due to Fichte’s lectures

world, as matter of outer sense, is regarded as the only existence and the only reality. Such a view is manifestly imperfect and partial—the things of sense are only there for thought; and a system which, abstracting from thought, proposes to treat them as self-existent facts, of necessity throws out of account the most important factor in the process of knowledge. This is, in essence, the view already dealt with in the first book of the ‘Vocation of Man:’ it is the view of much popular philosophy, and it is the speculative groundwork both of selfish Epicurean morality and of ethical pessimism.

The second view is that in which the ultimate reality is regarded as the law of independent, free intelligences, with equal rights. From the conception of such a law may be deduced (as was done in the earlier *Wissenschaftslehre*, and, implicitly, in the Kantian system) the existence of finite Egos and a world of the senses. The essence of this view is the notion of the abstract independence of the thinking subject, and in this consists its imperfection and one-sidedness. It is a purely negative standpoint, maintaining, beyond doubt, the freedom of the individual will, but rejecting all possibility of uniting moral action with consciousness of the supreme end, and love for it.<sup>1</sup> The law upon which the individual rests, is

on the ‘Doctrine of Religion.’ The treatment in the ‘*Phänomenologie*’ of the gradual rise from immediate perception to pure thought is more extended and richer than what appears in the ‘Doctrine of Religion,’ but the general resemblance is striking and unmistakable.

<sup>1</sup> This is, in substance, the criticism of all the post-Kantian thinkers upon Kant’s notion of the categorical imperative. It appears in Schiller, Schleiermacher, and Hegel. The view, as a whole, is that of formal morality, and its historical representatives are to be found in the Stoic and Kantian systems. With what is said by Fichte may be compared Hegel’s remarks in the ‘*Phänomenologie*,’ pp. 147-149.

only a law of order, not a creative rule. The third view takes up into itself what is of value in the second, but gives to it a higher and deeper significance. In the higher morality, as Fichte calls it,<sup>1</sup> the individual is filled with the desire to realise actively the divine will. The moral law, and that which springs from it—rights and state mechanism—are regarded only as means whereby the ideas, which represent in our consciousness the pre-scripts of the divine will, are to receive manifestation in fact. Acceptance of these ideas—the ideas upon which rest art, science, the polity of nations and religion—and self-renunciation for them, are the only sources of truly noble action. “Everything great and good upon which our present existence rests, from which it has proceeded, exists only because noble and powerful men have resigned all the enjoyments of life for the sake of ideas.”<sup>2</sup> The heroic life is the life of the higher morality, of devotion to ideas.

Even this heroic life manifests in one of its aspects an imperfection. “So long as joy in the deed is mingled with desires concerning the outward product of the deed, even the possessor of the higher morality is not yet perfect in purity and clearness ; and thus in the divine economy, the outward failure of his deed is the means of forcing him in upon himself, and of raising him to the yet higher standpoint of true religion—that is, to the comprehension of what it really is that he loves and strives after.” For if he is truly penetrated with the love of the divine law and life, he will recognise as the

<sup>1</sup> It is the view expounded in the third book of the ‘*Bestimmung des Menschen*.’

<sup>2</sup> “Grundzüge d. gegen. Zeitalters,” ‘*Werke*,’ vol. vii. p. 41.

one thing above all value the development of the divine life in him. He is one manifestation of the divine life : all that he does or thinks is the act and thought of the divine life. That the result of his thought and action should not correspond with his conception or desire will not affect him. The object of his will is only "that in the conduct of each individual there may be manifested purely that form which the essential divine nature has assumed within this particular individual—that, on the other hand, each individual may recognise God, as He is outwardly manifested to him in the conduct of all other men ; that all others may, in like manner, recognise God as He is outwardly manifested to them in the conduct of this particular individual—and that thus God alone may be ever manifested in all outward appearance." <sup>1</sup>

Religion, — the fourth stage of reflection, — which thus consists in regarding and recognising all earthly life as the necessary development of the one, original, perfectly good and blessed life, may indeed be realised in conduct, although the individual has not the clear consciousness of the thought which animates and directs his efforts. But in this consciousness, the final standpoint of science or philosophy, all others are contained and involved. "Religion without science is a mere faith, though an immovable faith ; science supersedes all faith and converts it into insight." <sup>2</sup> "From the beginning of the world down to the present day, religion, whatever form it may have assumed, has been essentially metaphysic ; and he who despises and de-

<sup>1</sup> 'Doctrine of Religion,' p. 533. Cf. "Grundzüge," Lect. xvi.

<sup>2</sup> 'Doctrine of Religion,' p. 460.

rides metaphysic—that is, everything *a priori*—either knows not what he does, or else he despises and derides religion.”<sup>1</sup> The final and crowning stage of the development of the individual consciousness is therefore that in which the finite spirit by thought or reason apprehends the organic plan of existence, knows with clearness the intimate nature of the relations which unite him and all other finite spirits in one community of free intelligences with a common aim and purpose, and thus subjectively realises the supreme synthesis of thought.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Grundzüge,” ‘Werke,’ vol. vii. p. 241.

<sup>2</sup> It is impossible to do more than call attention to the fact that under this view historical Christianity must be interpreted somewhat differently from the ordinary or popular fashion. In the “Anweisung” (Lecture vi.) and in the “Staatslehre,” Fichte enters upon a very elaborate comparison between his theory of religion and Christianity, as expressed in the Johannine Gospel, which he regards as the only authentic or pure statement of the Christian faith. The distinction drawn between the historical and the metaphysical elements in Christianity (particularly in the appendix to the sixth lecture) has had great influence on the later speculative theology in Germany. It would require, however, a very detailed treatment to show precisely Fichte’s position to theology. Lasson’s work (‘J. G. Fichte im Verhältniss zu Kirche und Staat,’ 1863) is very thorough. There is also a monograph on the subject by F. Zimmer (‘J. G. Fichte’s Religions-Philosophie,’ 1878).



## CHAPTER VIII.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS.

OF the two stages into which Fichte's speculations have been divided, only the first has exercised any influence on the historic development of philosophy, and to it consideration must be limited when the attempt is made to define the historic value of the system. As has been already indicated, this value appears to lie in the extended application made by Fichte of principles implicit in the critical philosophy. It is not too much to say that the full bearings of the critical method only become apparent when viewed in the light of the development it has received at the hands of Fichte and Hegel. In the Kantian system, the problems of speculation were taken up in the form presented by the antecedent, popular philosophy,—a form essentially limited in scope,—and it was therefore matter of some difficulty to discern the real import of the new treatment to which they were subjected. One may even say that from Kant himself the significance of much of his work was concealed by the limited and partial character of the questions which presented themselves to him as the essential

problems of speculative inquiry. In the critical philosophy can be traced the transition from the somewhat narrow, psychological method, characteristic of modern thought, to the larger view of speculative problems which recalls the great work of the Greek thinkers. The analysis of human knowledge, which had been for Locke and his successors the sole function of philosophy, appears in the critical system as part, though an essential part, of the more comprehensive inquiry dealing with the whole round of human interests, to which only the title philosophy by right belongs. The question how the human mind, regarded as a thing of definite or indefinite characteristics, comes to have the filling-in which we call experience, opens out, when duly considered, into the much wider problem as to the relation of any individual consciousness to the sum total of things, a relation which may be either cognitive, or practical, or religious. The merely subjective or psychological analysis of the cognitions possessed by the individual mind, even if the result, as stated in Locke and his followers, be accepted—that such cognitions are effects produced we know not how—still leaves at an immeasurable distance the true problems of philosophy. For it offers no explanation of the nature of this individual consciousness, formed in whatsoever fashion ; effects no junction between it and the universe of things supposed to originate it ; and can offer as final philosophic solution nothing beyond the barren propositions that experience somehow is, and that it consists of states of the individual mind.

Enough has been said, in the introductory remarks to the account of Fichte's system, to show that this solution is internally incoherent, and also to indicate where

the root of the incoherence is to be found. If we start in our philosophic inquiry with the supposition of an individual mind *and* a system of things, no human ingenuity can ever effect a reconciliation between the two isolated members of our hypothesis. The notion of individuality, one of the hardest to solve, has been the stumbling-block in the way of all the eighteenth century philosophy, and it is the pre-eminent merit of the critical system to have for the first time subjected the notion to detailed and rigorous treatment. The forms under which the critical method is applied—such as the distinctions between *a priori* and *a posteriori* elements in cognition, between matter and form, between phenomena and noumena, between sense, understanding, and reason—ought not to disguise from us the true nature of the question which underlies all of them. How knowledge becomes possible for any intelligence, is in fact the problem—how are we to think, under one of its aspects, the relation between individual consciousness and the wider sphere of reality?

To Kant himself, as was indicated, the full bearing of his work was not apparent. There still runs through all the critical work, the obtrusive idea that the ultimate reality is the individual consciousness, given as a fact, and that this individual consciousness is mechanically related to the sum of existence. Hence arise the numerous obscurities and inconsistencies of the Kantian system. Term after term is introduced in order somehow to effect the final synthesis between the individual mind and the wider sphere disclosed by reason; but such final synthesis is never reached, and indeed never can be reached, if at the outset an absolute difference is postu-

lated.<sup>1</sup> That there lay in the Kantian system the germs of a wider, more comprehensive solution, was undoubted; and the work of that which is called by pre-eminence German philosophy, has been the development of these germs.

To this development, the first great contribution was the '*Wissenschaftslehre*.' In it the critical method was carried out with definite consciousness of its full import, and the effort was made to work out systematically the thought upon which that method rested, and to apply it to the resolution of the whole body of philosophical problems. It has been, historically, the misfortune of the '*Wissenschaftslehre*,' that only its earlier form has played a part in influencing subsequent thought, for the defects of that form are manifest on the surface. Earnestly as Fichte strives to enforce the doctrine that self-consciousness, which is for thought the ultimate ground of reality, is not to be regarded as individual, but as that in and through which individuals are, and are connected with one another, he never succeeds in divesting his system of a certain air of subjective idealism. Moreover, the special applications of his method in the sphere of concrete, historical reality, show that in certain important aspects it had not yet lost its abstractness. His

<sup>1</sup> The forms of this ultimate difficulty are well known to Kantian students. They appear in the constant tendency to regard thought as analytic, in the independence assigned to sense-affection, in the subjective solution offered of antinomy, in the abstract deism of the Kantian theology, in the formalism of the Kantian ethics, and in the obscurity attaching to the critical treatment of teleology. The conjecture may be hazarded that, had Kant been penetrated with the spirit of the Cartesian philosophy, had he known anything of Spinoza—as he certainly did not—his work would have been more systematic and fruitful.

treatment of empirical science, of æsthetics, and of history in the widest sense, is essentially abstract and barren.<sup>1</sup> In fact, although Fichte was perfectly successful in seizing the critical principle, and in apprehending its universal bearing,—although, further, his work manifests a wonderful subtlety and skill in tracing the necessary consequences of the principle,—he was not able to evolve systematically from it the whole body of philosophy, nor do his results form a complete and perfectly concatenated whole. It was left for a later philosopher to take up afresh, in the light of the ‘*Wissenschaftslehre*’ and of Schelling’s contributions, the critical principle, and to incorporate all that was of value in them in one comprehensive system. The Hegelian method contains nothing but the systematic development of that which had already been brought to light in the ‘*Wissenschaftslehre* ;’ but as opposed to *Wissenschaftslehre*, the Hegelian work has all the value of the system to which the other has been the introduction. In some respects, it is true, an introduction has advantages over a system. The treatment is occasionally freer and more independent ; and so one may always assign to the ‘*Wissenschaftslehre*’ an honourable position alongside of the Hegelian work, and may obtain from it much light on what is obscure in the systematic result. But so far as solution of the philosophic problem is concerned, there

<sup>1</sup> At the same time it is to be said that the continuous objection to the *Wissenschaftslehre* by Schelling and Hegel, on the ground of its neglect of Nature, is not in all respects justified. So far as *Naturphilosophie* is concerned, Fichte’s position seems to us much more secure and in harmony with the philosophic notion than that of either Schelling or Hegel. The weakest portion of the Hegelian system is, beyond all question, the philosophy of nature.



seems nothing in the 'Wissenschaftslehre' which is not carried out with greater concreteness and fulness in the later system.<sup>1</sup>

With this view of the historical value of Fichte's philosophy, it seems unnecessary to attempt any statement as to the relation in which it stands to what one may call the present radical opposition of philosophic doctrines—the opposition between Hegelianism on the one hand, and scientific naturalism or realism on the other.<sup>2</sup> A single remark, however, may be permitted upon the defect already noted in Fichte's system, for this defect indicates the point towards which, as one may conjecture, philosophic thinking must be directed, and at which the opposed doctrines touch one another. The final notion of Fichte's philosophy, expressed more clearly in the later works than in the 'Wissenschaftslehre,' has been seen to be that of the divine or spiritual order of which finite spirits are the manifestation or realisation, and in the light of which human life and its surroundings appear as the continuous pro-

<sup>1</sup> The historic influence of the 'Wissenschaftslehre' is not exhausted in its influence on Hegel. At least two offshoots from the Kantian philosophy owe much to the Fichtian method and principles. Except his pessimism, which is no necessary consequence of the system, there is absolutely nothing in Schopenhauer's philosophy which is not contained in the later works of Fichte. And Herbart's Metaphysic, though deviating widely from preceding systems, owes no small portion of its fundamental notion to Fichte's analysis of reality as simple positing by the Ego.

<sup>2</sup> Hegelianism is here taken in a wide sense. It is not implied that all or any who in the main would rank themselves on this side, are inclined to accept the Hegelian work in its entirety. A thoughtful and instructive notice of what is here called the radical opposition of philosophic doctrines will be found in Professor Masson's 'Recent British Philosophy' (3d ed.), pp. 277-297.

gress in ever higher stages towards realisation of the final end of reason. Under this conception, the oppositions of thought which play so important a part in philosophy,—Being and Thought, Mind and Nature, Soul and Body, Freedom and Law, Natural Inclination and Moral Effort, Mechanism and Teleology,—are reconciled. They appear in their due place as different aspects of the several stages in and through which the spiritual order is realised. But, as has also been seen, the element wanting in Fichte's system is the definite reconciliation between this view of the spiritual development of reason and the natural, historical development of nature and humanity. It is this second element that forms the substance of modern scientific realism;<sup>1</sup> and, as in Fichte's system the difficulty is the transition from the spiritual to the real order, so here, the counter-difficulty of transition from the real order to the order of thought presents itself as the ultimate problem. Of the value of scientific realism as a contribution to philosophic reflection, there can be no question. Every effort of speculative thought is affected by the general condition of knowledge, and every advance in scientific inquiry opens up new aspects of these notions through which explanations of speculative difficulties have been found. The problem which now lies before philosophy is, in brief, the effort to re-think the new materials that have been furnished in such ample quantity. So far, however, as scientific realism has yet endeavoured to offer a metaphysical explanation of its own procedure, its success has been small. The attempt to regard thought as somehow arising from mechanical con-

<sup>1</sup> A system of which Mr Spencer may be taken as the best known, though by no means the only or the best, representative.

ditions has only resulted in the reappearance of the old perplexities which pressed with such intolerable weight upon the earlier English philosophy. We cannot regard thought as merely a product, a thing, of which the characteristics are due to the nature of the mechanical antecedents out of which it has arisen. When we do so, we are at once confronted with the problem, how are we to conceive the nature of these antecedents? By supposition they are not in thought, but external to it, and therefore never to be reached in thought. Shall we then say — there are varied modes of consciousness, thoughts of different kinds, and, as these are products, they must be due to some ultimate reality, the nature of which is for ever inconceivable? This is merely to give, as explanation, the impossibility of any explanation.

A fundamental difficulty of this nature is clear evidence of the abstract or one-sided character of the principle which has been applied. It is not possible that the view of thought as a thing or product should also be competent to explain the nature of thought as self-consciousness. Reflection upon self, in which the individual consciousness transcends its own individuality, through which only it can recognise itself as one with other individuals, is not explicable through the notion of mechanical composition. Nor is scientific realism more successful in the application of its favourite conception, that of development. Neither the evolution of consciousness, nor the concrete nature of consciousness which appears as the final term of evolution, can be regarded as completely explained by mere reference to the simplest, most abstract elements involved in the development. The true notion of humanity is not to be found

by consideration of the undeveloped thought, but in thought in all the fulness of its concrete life and reality. The external history of the several stages by which human thought and culture have developed, though an indispensable auxiliary to philosophic reflection, can never be accepted as adequately solving the problem of the significance or meaning of experience. The full treatment of the whole mass of empirical detail is impossible without a more thorough metaphysic—that is, without a more systematic discussion of the notions by which experience becomes intelligible for the conscious subject. No contrast is sharper than that between scientific realism and the philosophic method of which the ‘*Wissenschaftslehre*’ is a type; nevertheless the two are complementary, and the very sharpness of the contrast shows that in the reconciliation of the apparent difference between them lies the problem for our present speculative efforts.

END OF FICHTE.











**PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE  
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET**

---

**UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY**

---

B  
2847  
A3  
1903  
c.2  
ROBA

